J. A. KERSWELL

THE SLASHER MOVIE BOOK

The slasher movie is the most reviled but successful of horror's subgenres. Taking its cue from Hitchcock, grind-house movies, and the gory Italian *giallo* thrillers of the 1970s, slasher movies brought a new high in cinematic violence and suspense to mainstream cinema. For six bloody years (1978–1984)—the "golden age" of slashers—cinema screens and video stores were stalked by homicidal maniacs with murder and mayhem on their minds.

The Slasher Movie Book details the subgenre's surprising beginnings, revels in its g(l)ory days, and discusses its recent resurgence. Packed with reviews of the best (and worst) slasher movies and illustrated with an extensive collection of distinctive and often graphic color poster artwork from around the world, this book also looks at the political, cultural, and social influences on the slasher movie and its own effect on other film genres.

$24.95 (CAN $27.95)

ON FRIDAY THE 13th,
THEY BEGAN TO DIE HORRIBLY.
ONE...BY ONE.
WELCOME TO
CAMP
CRYSTAL LAKE
FRIDAY
THE
13
TH

THE SLASHER MOVIE BOOK

THE SLASHER MOVIE BOOK

J. A. KERSWELL

CHICAGO REVIEW PRESS
An A Cappella Book

DEDICATION

First of all, thank you to everyone who good-naturedly watched a slasher movie late on a Saturday night because he or she was asked to. Your humour and patience have not gone unnoticed. Many people's enthusiasm and knowledge have helped make this book what it is – but I simply don't have the space to acknowledge them all, so I hope they'll forgive me. Thanks to my parents for letting me stay up late to watch horror movies – and, if not exactly encouraging my burgeoning love of the genre, at least turning a blind eye to it. Thank you to Aruna, whose idea over a glass of wine was the chrysalis for this book. My eternal gratitude to the people involved in making these films for taking the time to speak to me. Thanks also to Joseph, Erik, Ryhan, Doug, Ross, Gina, Jake, Dobbs, Amanda and all those at The Bodycount Continues forums. And, to Stuart, for suffering through more slasher movies than most people have had hot dinners.

The slasher defined:

'Some stupid killer stalking some big-breasted girl who can't act, who is always running up the stairs when she should be running out the front door.'

– Sidney Prescott, the Final Girl in *Scream* (1996)

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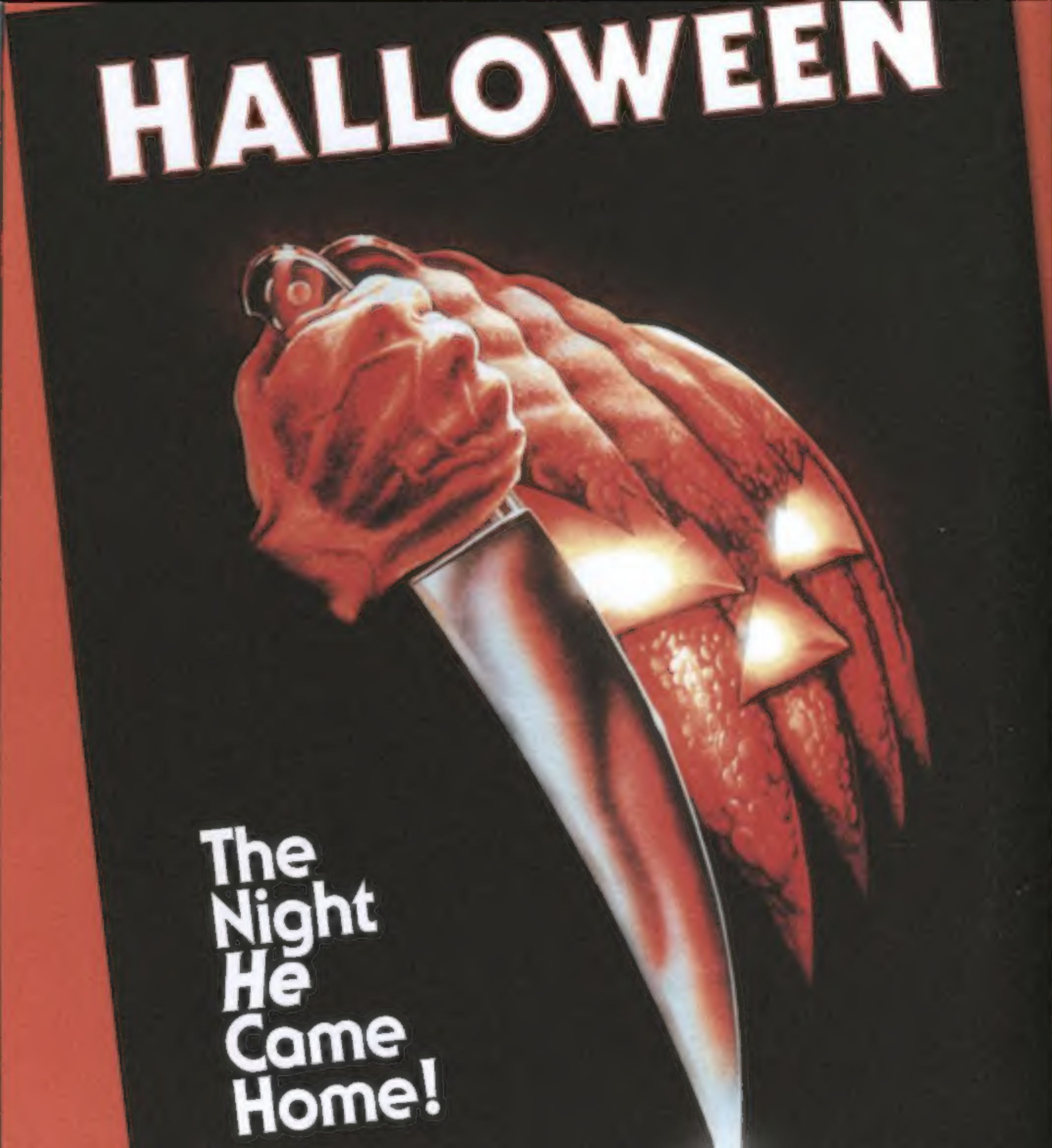
HALLOWEEN



The Night He Came Home!

INTRODUCTION

I saw my first bona fide slasher movie at the tender age of 12, back in the early 1980s. *Halloween II* – the 1981 sequel to director John Carpenter's seminal film *Halloween* (the film that launched the Golden Age of slashers) – was the one to pop my cher courtesy of a clunky Betamax VCR. I was immediately hooked, enthralled by everything about it – the music, the darkness, the unstoppable maniac, the cat-and-mouse action and even the corn-syrup blood

stores in the United Kingdom carried movies

and maniacs. My fun was ultimately spoilt

nasties (see page 126 for more on these), which led many slashers to vanish from U.K. shelves for years to come.

Even for a self-confessed and unashamed fan like me, it is a little tricky to define the slasher. A

Below: Japanese

Carpenter's seminal slasher

'There's more than one way to lose your heart!'

– *My Bloody Valentine*

Soon I was searching out more such illicit thrills, but my exuberant drive was thwarted somewhat by my age. The school bus passed by the local cinema, and I would stare longingly at a seemingly never-ending sequence of bloody movies – *Friday the 13th Part 2*, *My Bloody Valentine* and *Happy Birthday to Me* (all 1981). They were tantalizingly out of reach until 1984, when I managed to sneak into *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, but by that time the slasher movie boom was all but over. I had to console myself with feeding my passion on video, and for a few glorious, unregulated years, video

blend of horror and thriller conventions (from earlier films that could be dubbed 'proto-slashers'), it is a cat-and-mouse movie, usually involving a number of teenage victims. At its most basic. The murders are generally outlandish and bloody, invariably

11 INTRODUCTION

JESUS SOTOMAYOR

¡MATA BELLAS MUJERES!
¡DESTROZA A LOS HOMBRES!

EL ASESINO DE ROSEMARY

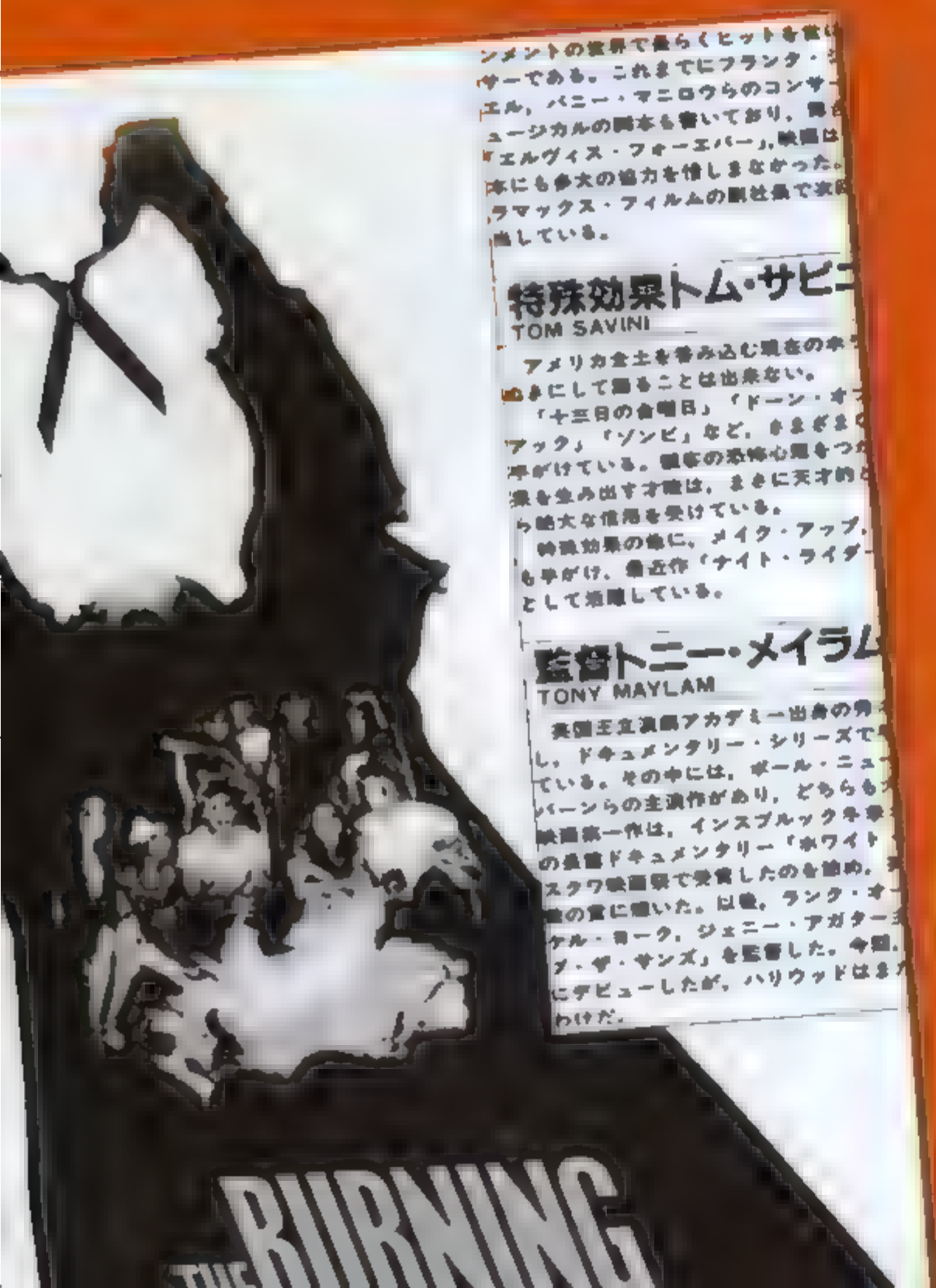
SI LO ATRAPA... USTED DESEARA LA MUERTE

¡LA MAS CRUEL Y SANGRIENTA HISTORIA JAMAS FILMADA!

con FARLEY GRANGER y VICKY DAWSON Director JOSEPH ZITO

...ter [illegible] about 10 years ago the cutlaws turned to stunned silence once the axe began to fall. Part of the pleasure [illegible] stuck-up teens and lust-addled adults have [illegible] a cut above, added to their already impressive appeal. For example, *Halloween* [illegible] still a sick shock to behold.

The killer does [illegible] for *The Burning*



ンメントの世界で最も多くヒットを放
サーである。これまでにフランク・
エル，バニー・マニロウらのコンサー
ュージカルの脚本も書いており，舞台
『エルヴィス・フォーエバー』，映画は
本にも多大の協力を惜しまなかった。
ラマックス・フィルムの副社長で
当している。

特殊効果トム・サビ
TOM SAVINI

アメリカ全土を巻き込む現在のホ
きにして語ることは出来ない。
「十三日の金曜日」「ドーン・オ
アック」「ゾンビ」など，さまざま
学がけている。観客の恐怖心理をつ
景を生み出す才能は，まさに天才的
ら絶大な信頼を受けている。
特殊効果の他に，メイク・アップ
も手がけ，最近作「ナイト・ライダー
として活躍している。

監督トニー・メイラム
TONY MAYLAM

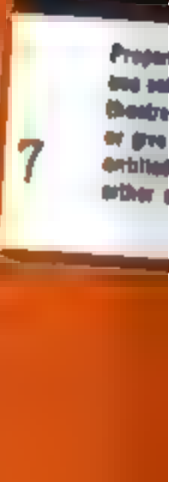
米国立演劇アカデミー出身の男
し，ドキュメンタリー・シリーズで
ている。その中には，ポール・ニュ
バーンらの主演作があり，どちらも
映画第一作は，インスブルックを
の長編ドキュメンタリー「ホワイト
スクワ映画祭で受賞したのを始め，
地の賞に輝いた。以後，ランク・オ
ケル・ヨーク，ジェニー・アガター
ブ・ザ・サンズ」を監督した。今回
にデビューしたが，ハリウッドはま
わけだ。

despite its hell-bound scares and seriously antiquated teen talk.

The Slasher Movie Book takes on [illegible] popular history of the slasher. However, writing a book on films that most critics have [illegible] difficult. Myths and misconceptions have sprung up around many of these films, and I've approached [illegible] films such as [illegible] with the [illegible] they deserve. Some films, for example, languished on the shelf before [illegible] to video, and some made it to neither. [illegible] film is that of the [illegible] The [illegible] are always expressed in US dollars, unless [illegible]

It would be impossible to cover every [illegible] especially given the glut of straight-to-DVD [illegible] lingering look at the best – and, yes, I guess [illegible]

[illegible] unleashed his bogeyman on small-town [illegible] folklore and violent [illegible]



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any credit upon return of this material. This material
st be returned or destroyed immediately after use.

The BURNING

COPY 1984 FILM

LITHO. IN U. S. A.

If You're Not Back By Midnight... You Won't Be Coming Home!

PROM NIGHT

Fear stalks the high school prom! A fiendish killer seeks revenge on four romantic teenagers who share one terrifying secret!

Leslie Nielsen • Jamie Lee Curtis

FIRST TIME ON TV!

9:00PM 2,6

THE HAPPIEST DAY OF THEIR LIVES BEC
A NIGHT OF GRADUATING TERROR...

PROM NIGHT

Starring
JAMIE LEE CURTIS
and LESLIE NIELSEN

TONIGHT 9PM

to another slasher movie classic – *Friday the 13th*. For six glorious years nowhere in America seemed safe and high schools and summer camps ran with teenage blood – every holiday was marked with a flash of the knife. *The Slasher Movie Book* revels in this most disreputable of subgenres and also touches on the cultural impact of the genre on society and on other subgenres.

In this book I also look at how the slasher movie descended into straight-to-video dreck as Hollywood continued to plunder its excesses to spruce up mainstream thrillers. Getting into the game relatively late, countries outside America, from Iran to Mexico, began producing their own versions of the slasher – often with jaw-dropping results. However its true resurrection came in the mid 1990s with Wes Craven's *Scream* launching a similar flood of imitations. Today the slasher movie packs multiplexes just like it did 30 years ago. Needless to say, just like most slasher movie villains, this is the subgenre that just won't die.

My love affair with the slasher movie has endured through the very best and the very worst of the subgenre. In hindsight, the promise of the thrill – the tantalizing terrors that the mind of a young teenager could dream up – often left it disappointed, but I have kept on watching slasher after slasher to try to replicate that delicious frisson of terror, the one that I experienced at age 12 when viewing *It Crawled In* for the first time.

BLOODY BEGINNINGS – GRAND GUIGNOL TO PSYCHO

From childhood fairy tales and legends to the adult fare of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), we have always been intrigued by the desire to be frightened, and our fascination with violence has endured.

As with other types of entertainment, it was the moving picture that brought the slasher to the masses. The horror movie proved to be an immediate favourite with the public, and many of the films that came before John Carpenter's seminal film *Halloween* provided a heady brew of influences. These proto-slashers slowly shaped what we now consider to be the slasher movie formula. Few films that were made pre-Hitchcock's *Psycho* could be described as slasher movies per se, but many other genres – literary, theatrical and cinematic – helped mould the subgenre, including a form of theatre found in late 19th-century Paris, Le Théâtre du Grand Guignol.

GRAND GUIGNOL – THE THEATRE OF BLOOD

Today the term 'Grand Guignol' (which literally translates as 'big puppet show') refers to any entertainment that deals with horror – especially the gloating, visual use of extreme graphic violence. Founded by Oscar Metenier in 1897, the theatre originally staged naturalistic plays. Five or six short plays – anything from suspense thrillers to sex farces – were performed nightly and would invariably feature characters from the city's underclasses. The Grand Guignol's main attractions were its horror plays, however.

With titles such as *Le laboratoire des hallucinations* and *L'horrible passion*, these plays often climaxed with staged acts of torture, murder and mayhem, and they presented a particularly bleak world in which villains rarely received punishment. Early gore special effects saw throats slashed, eyes ripped out and faces burned off with acid. Perhaps realizing that this crowd pleasing horror was the main reason for the theatre's success, playwright André de Lorde (who took over the theatre's directorship in 1898) helped cement the Grand Guignol's notoriety as he put on an increasing number of plays with insanity as their main theme.

The theatre, which flourished for over 60 years, was most popular between the

'These plays often climaxed with staged acts of torture, murder and mayhem.'

'A hideously deformed maniac, who believes he is a cat, is on the loose.'

FROM THE AMERICAN AND BRITISH STAGES TO THE SCREEN

[illegible] the Ameri[illegible]

[illegible] Hopwood. This s[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

Women Alone the Victims
of Strange
Savage
Killer!
THE LEOPARD MAN
DENNIS
O'KEEFE
MARGO

NEW THRILLS!
NEW TERROR!
THE SCARLET CLAW

...ror slasher plots, even to this day. Each of the murders in Clouzot's novel parallels ...

...one of ten toy soldiers is removed. This seemingly perverse merging of objects of childhood innocence with murder became especially popular in slasher ...dia – perhaps most ...

...highly influential Italian ...

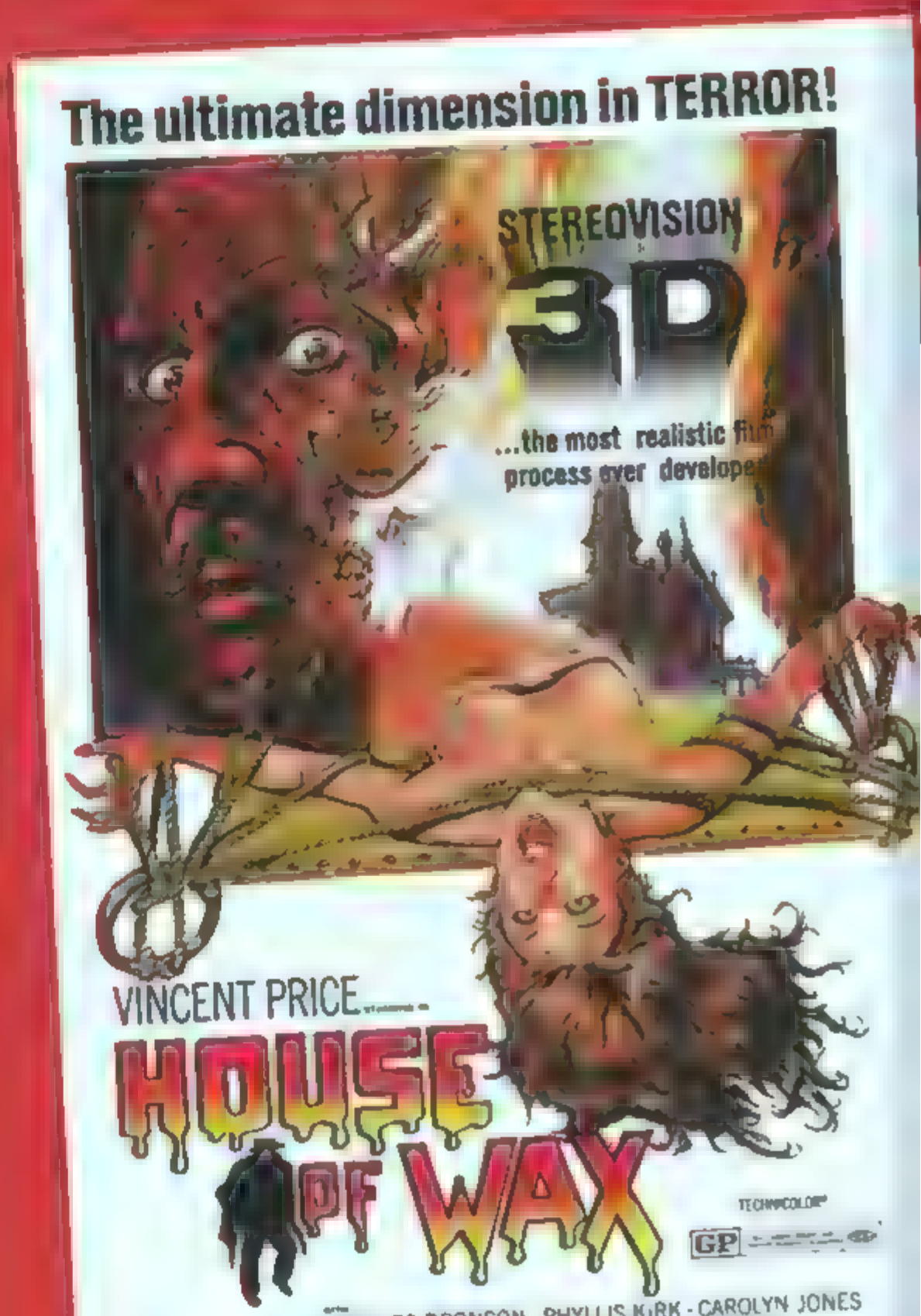
...What is especially ...

...simplistic the rules of ...

...Again, this has parallels ...

...Another influential film ...

...killer murdering women with physical disabilities. An old woman (Ethe... ...mute maid (Dorothy McGuire) might be next on the killer's list. The use of a seemingly helpless but sympathetic young ...



$2.25 CANADA/$2.50

¿Por qué Fueron Siempre sus
Víctimas Mujeres de la Noche

El balancear de
una bota
El vaivén de la
cadera
Un cuerpo sensual
El repentino vibrar
de un cuchillo
después, un
helado grito de
pavor escapando
EL REPETIDO
SU BRUTAL ACTO
DE MATAR UNA
Y MIL VECES MA

DEGRADADA
LONDRES

'Screaming Mimi provocatively promised suspense around every curve.'

It delivered – at least in the

as just escaped from an

that he pulls from his medicine bag. A

A new kind of drama and excitement from the screen's master of suspense... as his cameras move into the icy blackness of the unexplored!

LFRED
HCOCK'S
YCHO

CERT 'X'

ANTHONY
PERKINS
VERA
MILES
JOHN
GAVIN
MARTIN
BALSAM
JOHN
McINTIRE
JANET
LEIGH
MARION
CRANE
HITCHCOCK
STEFANO
A PARAMOUNT

o one... BUT NO ONE... will be admitted to the theatre after the start of each performance of PSYCHO.

PSYCO

ANTHONY PERKINS - VERA MILES
JOHN GAVIN - MARTIN BALSAM - JOHN McGIVER
JANET LEIGH - MARION CROANE

ALFRED HITCHCOCK

JOSEPH STEFANO - ROBERT BLOCH

UNIVERSAL & CINEMA INTERNATIONAL CORPORATION

FLEEING TO A

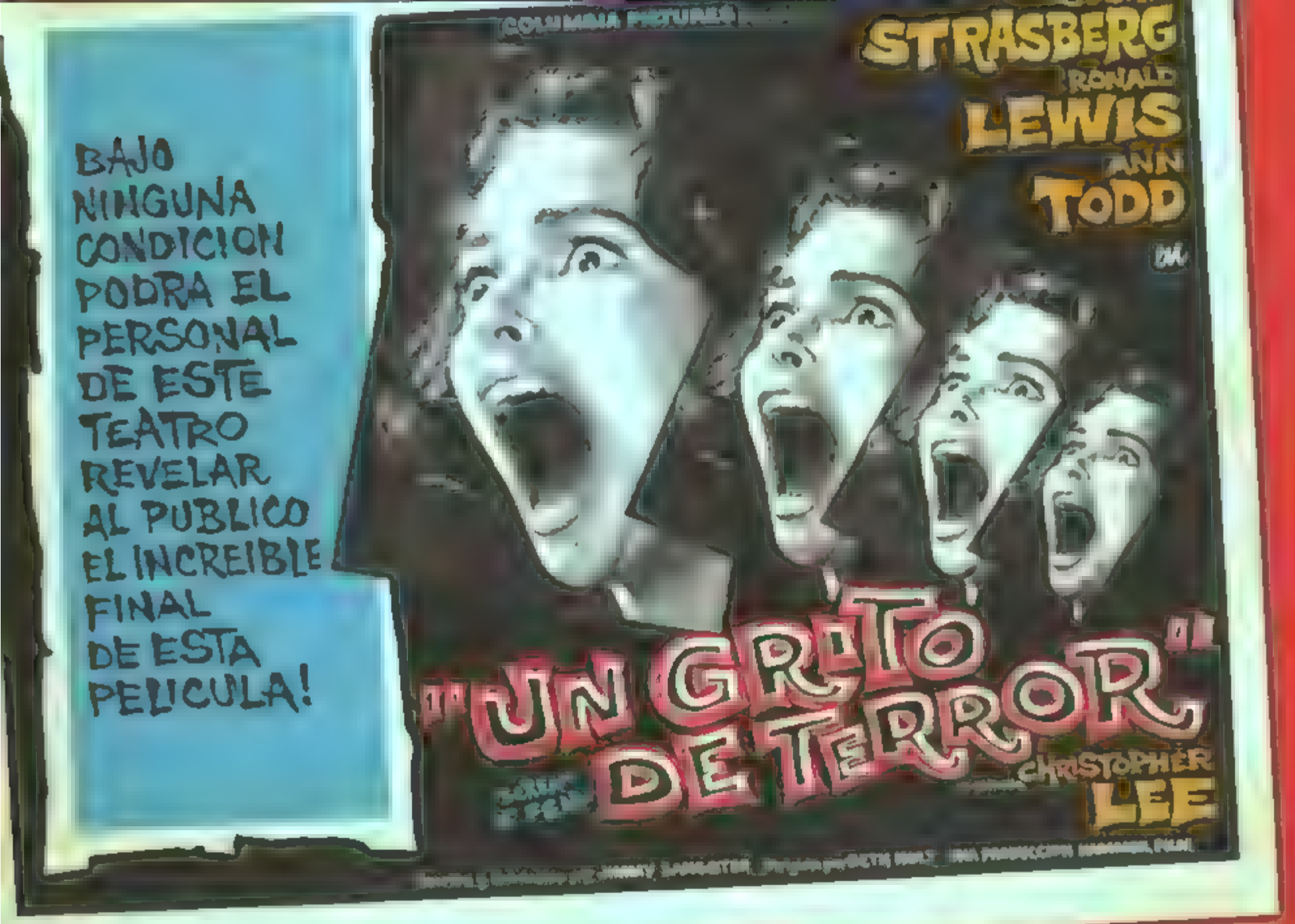
'She might have fooled me but she didn't fool my mother.'

–Norman Bates, *Psycho*

ECIAL "FRIGHT BREAK"
re will be a special FRIGHT BREAK
ring the showing of "Homicidal." All
ose too timid to take the climax will
welcomed to the COWARD'S CORNER!
THE STORY OF A PSYCHOTIC KILLER!
HOMICIDAL

HOMICIDAL starring GLENN CORBETT, PATRICIA BREslin,
EUGENE LEONTOVICH ALAN BUNCE JAMES WESTERFIELD and introducing JEAN ARLESS.
A WILLIAM CASTLE PRODUCTION

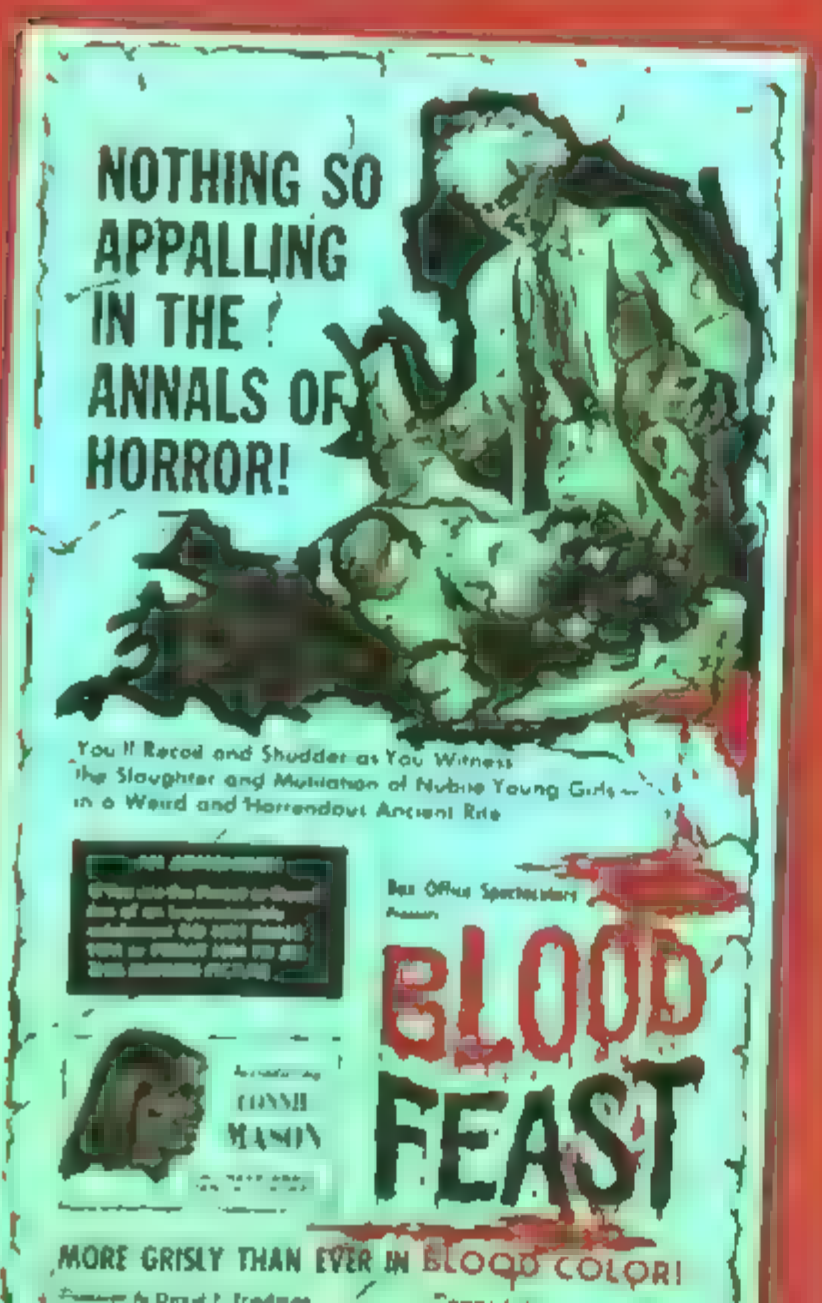
BAJO NINGUNA CONDICION PODRA EL PERSONAL DE ESTE TEATRO REVELAR AL PUBLICO EL INCREIBLE FINAL DE ESTA PELICULA!



TECHNICOLOR
LAS MUÑECAS DE LA MUERTE

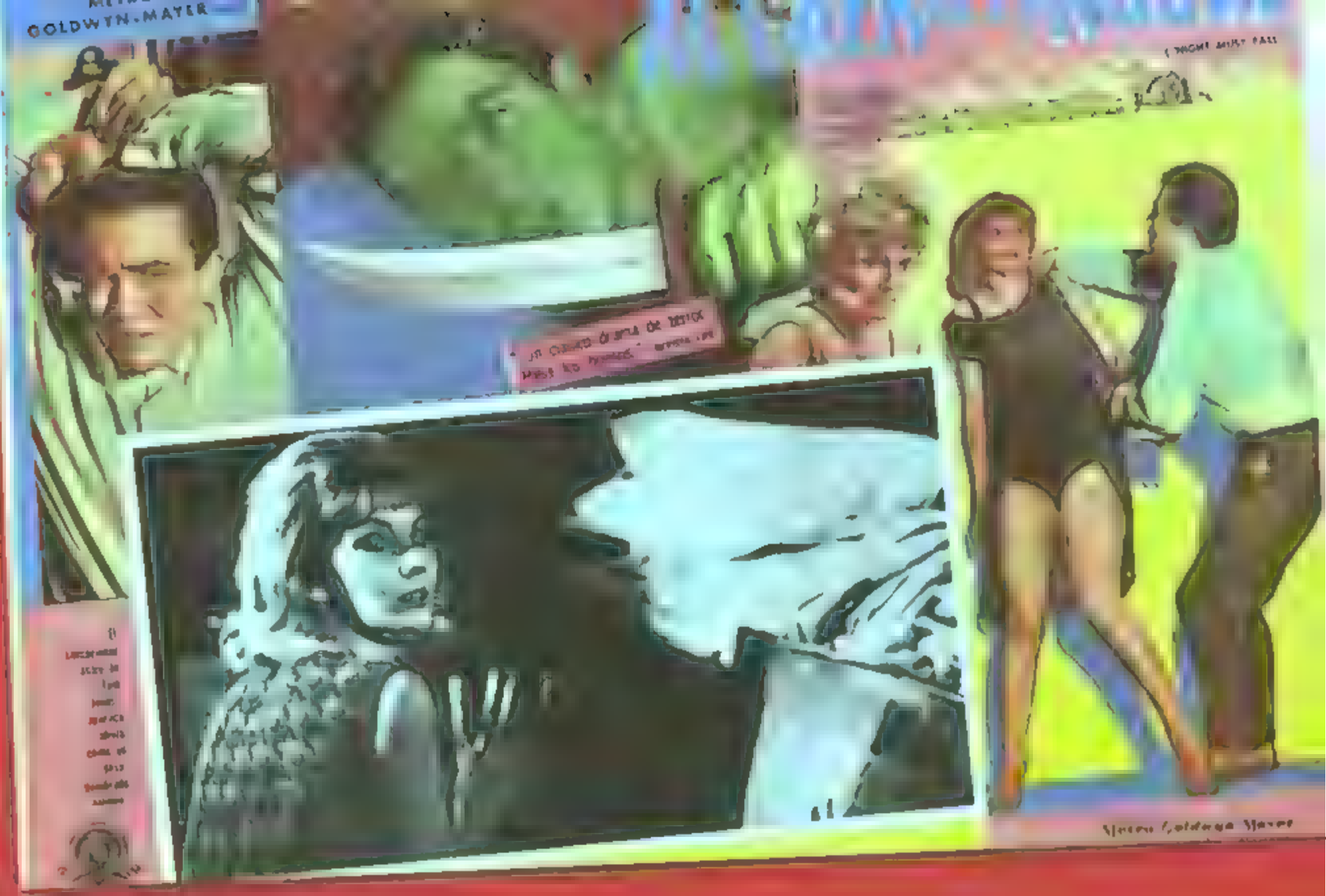
British thriller *Horror* (1957). Hammer's

Golden Age slasher *The Prowler* (1981).



In 1965, nine years before he made *Th*

sport swindle (who made the 1997 Bond


METRO-GOLDWYN-MAYER

1950s teen icon
Frankie Avalon . . .
gets stabbed
in the crotch
with a scimitar.

ONE BY ONE THEY WILL DIE!

THE HOUSE THAT SCREAMED

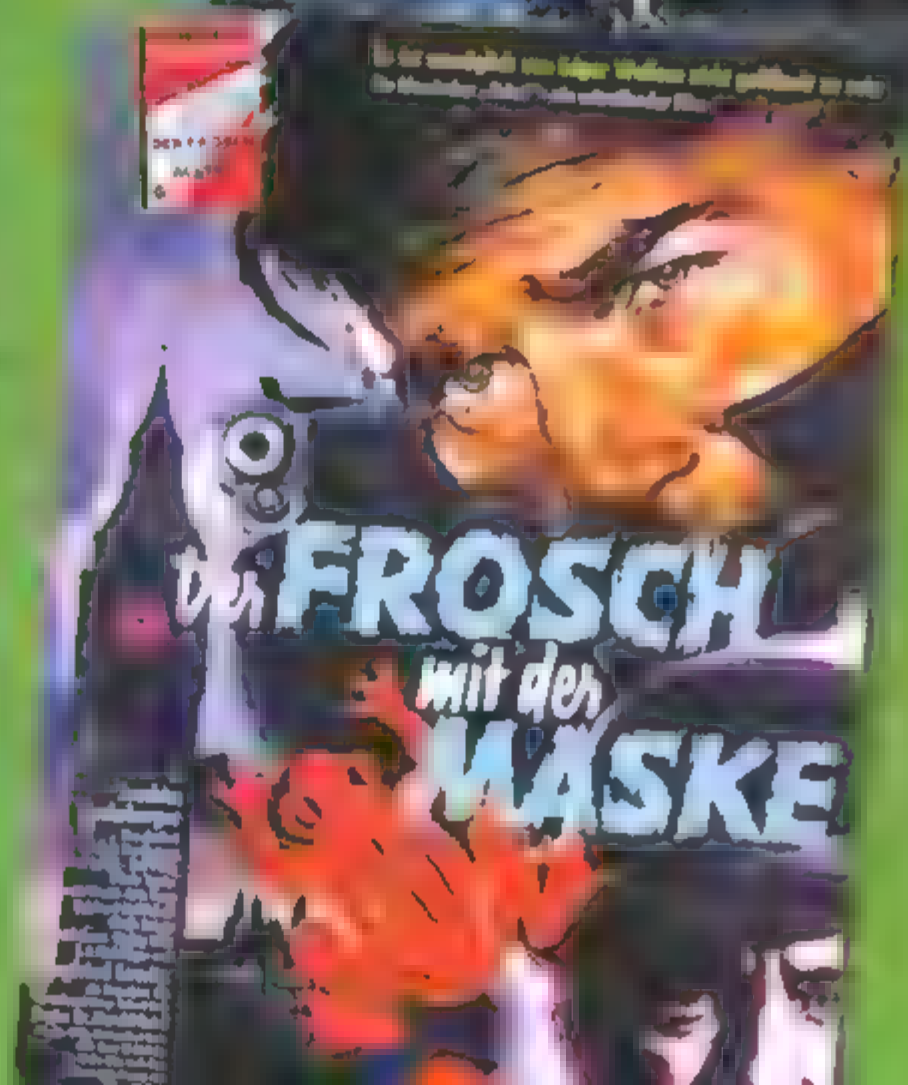
STARRING
LILLI PALMER
CRISTINA GALBO, JOHN MC

THE GERMAN *KRIMI* – EDGAR WALLACE SPEAKING

It would be impossible to talk about the slasher without referring to the other European subgenres that influenced it, including the German *krimi* (which simply translates as crime or mystery thriller).

A hooded

Der NEUESTE
Edgar Wallace Krimi
Der Mönch mit der Peitsche


FROSCH
mit der
MASKE

'The murderous goings-on are fueled by greed and criminality.'

Edgar Wallace
Zimmer
13

‘The Italians quickly became the masters of the knife – upping the levels of violence.’

HORST TAPPERT • UECHI GUAS

EL GORILA de SOHO

DEATH STALKS ON HIGH HEELS – THE ITALIAN *GIALLO*

The *giallo* takes its name from a series of lurid thrillers with trademark yellow covers (*giallo* means 'yellow' in Italian), which first appeared in Italy in 1929. Typically Latin in nature, the *giallo* took the staid crime novel and spiced it up with doses of sex, glamour and violence – and great soundtracks.

Above: Sex, death and madness feature regularly in the *giallo*, as in this typically delirious still from *Death Walks at Midnight*.

Unlike American slasher movies of the 1970s and 1980s, the protagonists of the *gialli* were rarely teenagers. Rather these films were populated with young successful 20- or 30-somethings, who sported the latest fashions, thought nothing of jetting off to exotic destinations and were partial to a tipple of J&B Scotch Whiskey (if you thought product placement was a new thing, think again). Mostly eschewing the zany outfits of the *krimi* villains, the *giallo* retained money or madness as the primary driving force for murder.

However, the joys of many *gialli* are the outlandish and often highly improbable plot twists. The *giallo*, which increasingly mixed the horror and thriller genres to great effect, also differed from the later slasher movies by placing much emphasis on detective work to uncover the identity of the killer – either by the police or the protagonists themselves.

THE *GIALLO* TAKES OFF

However, it wasn't until the 1960s that the *giallo* made the transition from page to screen. Despite a few earlier attempts, it is Mario Bava's *The Girl Who Knew Too Much* (*La ragazza che sapeva troppo*

1963) that is widely credited as the first film in the genre. The basic plot follows a serial killer on the loose in Rome and a young tourist (Leticia Roman) who may possibly have seen the killer commit the latest murder. Tame by the standards of the excesses of the 1970s, the film features many key elements that would become synonymous with the *giallo*, including a protagonist-turned-detective, a killer on the loose and an obsession with travel and a jet-setting lifestyle.

Bava was reportedly not satisfied with *The Girl Who Knew Too Much*, but his next film, *Blood and Black Lace* (*Sei donne per l'assassino*, 1964), proved to be even more influential to the genre. Highly stylized, the film focuses on a string of murders of models at a fashion house. It introduced the notion of the black-gloved killer armed with a knife, stalking victims and killing them in over-the-top set pieces. The mystery element was strengthened by the use of a mask to hide the identity of the killer. A blank of white instead of a face created a bogeyman who, in reality, could be any one of the shady-looking suspects

'The *giallo* increasingly mixed the horror and thriller genres to great effect.'

American artwork for Mario Bava's seminal *Blood and Black Lace*

Italian artwork for Lucio Fulci's controversial *The New York Ripper*

Her back looks to all the world like a pretty ordinary one, but it soon turns out to be something that John Carpenter did later with the Shape in the great slasher classic *Halloween* (1978).

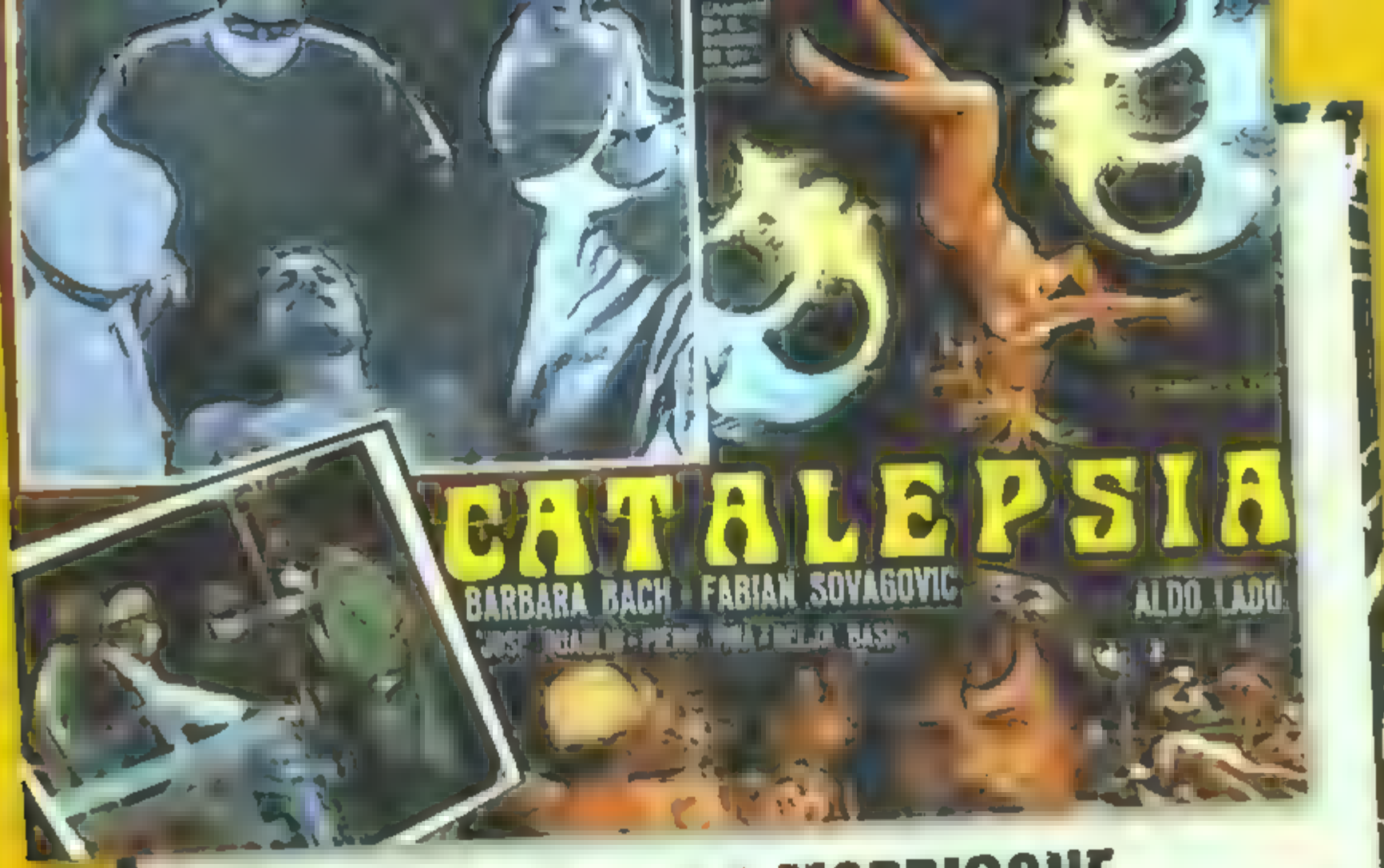
Soon the *giallo* began to gain popularity with audiences. It also attracted the attention of auteurs such as Dario Argento, whose early films such as *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* (1970) and the art-establishment hit *Deep Red* (1975) helped to create a strong following with *Suspiria* (1977) and *Inferno* (1980), as well as Mario Bava's *Blood and Black Lace* (1964), which was a precursor to the slasher film, and *Five Dolls for an August Moon* (1970), which was a science-fiction hybrid based on a story by Edgar Wallace. Fulci's contribution was the wonderfully trashy *Don't Torture a Duckling* (1972), which focuses on a group of suspects bumped off by a killer dressed in priest's garments. The latter director was probably influenced by the red-blooded sadistic killer in Nicolas Roeg's atmospheric Anglo-Italian horror-film hybrid *Don't Look Now* (1973).

GIALLI IN THE 1970S

The term *giallo* (Italian for "yellow") was first used to describe a series of Italian crime novels with bright yellow covers published by Mondadori in the 1930s. The term was then applied to Italian crime films, which were usually characterized by a high level of violence and sexuality, and often featured black-gloved killers. Many of the early films, including Dario Argento's *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*

Lord Mercan
abby card for Seven
Blood Stained
Orchids

SIETE ORQUIDEAS MANCHADAS DE SANGRE
LOS CRIMENES MAS PERVI
E INCREIBLES COME
DIABOLICAMENTE PO
ENFERMO MEN
A MELL - PIER PAOLO CAPPONI - ROSSELLA FALK
Director UMBERTO LENZI



MURDER MUSIC BY MORRICONE

Despite the carnage in the *giallo*, many were blessed with strikingly good soundtracks by composers who went on to become famous. Although perhaps best known for his spaghetti western film scores, Ennio Morricone has scored more *gialli* than any other composer. Morricone's music for the *giallo* has been much imitated – both at the time and since then – but is, in my opinion, rarely made better by other composers. His music reflects the extravagant lifestyles of the cast on screen (lounge and Brazilian bossa nova beats often accentuated with dreamy, nonsensical female vocals), but he adds in the necessary thriller and horror elements of the *giallo* (discordant meditations on fear and tension).

Morricone's career started in the late 1950s, but in 1970 he composed his first *giallo* soundtrack for Dario Argento's debut *giallo*, *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*. He also scored Argento's *The Cat o' Nine Tails* (*Il gatto a nove code*, 1971) and *Four Flies on Grey Velvet* (*4 mosche di velluto grigio*, 1971), the other film that completed what became known as Argento's 'animal trilogy'. In the 1970s, Morricone contributed memorable soundtracks to many *gialli*, including *Forbidden Photos of a Lady Above Suspicion* (*Le foto proibite di una signora per bene*, 1970), *Short Night of the Glass Dolls* (*La corta notte delle bambole di vetro*, 1971) and *Who Saw Her Die?* (*Chi l'ha vista morire?*, 1972). So popular did his music become that his name was often featured prominently on the film's promotional literature.

Mario...
lobby card for *Short Night of the Glass Dolls*, featuring a musical score by Morricone.

Gratuitous queen
Edwige Fenech in *Next*.

What have They Done to Your Daughters? was released in the United States in 1980 with a new title and artwork to capitalize on the slasher movie craze.

...which [illegible] popular actress Edwige Fenech [illegible] Mario... [illegible] Wardh [illegible] the scorn [illegible] opposite [illegible] crystallized the disparate elements of the genre to create perhaps the most notorious [illegible] feature of Arcane's [illegible] years.

The [illegible] of Sergio Martino's *Next* [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] Wardh [illegible] to be a [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] of remakes - and it was [illegible] that was certainly [illegible] *Next* was the first pairing of the [illegible] Spanish sex goddess of the [illegible] Edwige Fenech and George Hilton. Fenech plays the wife of an American diplomat who [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] and also [illegible] exposing Hilton's [illegible] playboy [illegible] [illegible] may not be involved in the murders. The suspected location is [illegible] and parking lot where Fenech is menaced by the [illegible] killer. It's been [illegible] in many [illegible]

GEORGE HILTON · ANITA STRINDBE

LA COLA DEL ESCORPION

EVELYN STEWART · LUIGI PISTILL

SERGIO MARTINI

TECHNOCHROME

'Among the mayhem, a face is whacked with a machete, and a young couple is impaled on a spear as they make love.'

THE DARKNESS OF DARIO ARGENTO

Argento is arguably the crown prince of the *giallo*, his films renowned for their visual extravagance and violent set pieces as well as for putting a macabre twist on childhood themes. John Carpenter is said to be an admirer of Argento's work.

Argento once controversially stated he would rather watch a beautiful woman being murdered on film than an ugly one or a man. He is also infamous for including scenes where his real-life daughters and ex-wife, who act in his films, are repeatedly killed off or violently abused for the camera.

The son of movie producer Salvatore Argento, he started his career as a film critic before moving behind the camera to direct the highly influential *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* in 1970 (see image above and artwork bottom right). Taking the lead from the *gialli* of Mario Bava, Argento quickly established his trademark elements of beautifully staged set pieces, fetishizing graphic violence, and clever misdirection. The film was a major hit in Italy and grabbed the attention of audiences abroad. Argento followed this with two further *gialli* in what became known as his 'animal trilogy' – *The Cat o' Nine Tails* (*Il gatto a nove code*, 1971) and *Four Flies on Grey Velvet* (*4 mosche di velluto grigio*, 1971). *Deep Red* followed in 1975 (see image top right) and is considered by critics to be one of the best examples of the *giallo* – Argento also considers it his favourite among his own films.

The visually stunning *Suspiria* (1977) kept elements of the *giallo* but was his first foray

into the supernatural. Argento didn't return to the genre until *Tenebrae* (1982) and was perhaps inspired to do so by the success of the American slasher movies in the early 1980s. The film's violent set pieces (including an axe to the head and a balletic arterial spray from a severed arm) earned it the dubious honour of being classified as a 'video nasty' in the United Kingdom. Many critics of Argento's movies feel that the quality of his work began to decline afterwards. *Phenomena* (1985) and *Opera* (1987) both attempted to repeat the success of *Suspiria*.

By the 1990s, the smart-set audiences, who had once seen Argento as cutting edge, had long deserted him. In 1993's *Trauma*, in which he directed his own daughter, he unsuccessfully attempted to make a US-set *giallo*. The hallucinatory and visually arresting *The Stendhal Syndrome* (*La sindrome di Stendhal*, 1996) followed. Argento went back to his roots with *Sleepless* (2001), which returned to the obsessions of his earliest films and was regarded as a crowd-pleasing *giallo* by many fans. The 2004 *The Card Player* (*Il cartaio*) was the polar opposite; despite being another *giallo* it eschewed Argento's normal visual extravagances and was met with indifference by audiences. The 2005 TV movie *Do You Like Hitchcock?* (*Ti piace Hitchcock?*) was a homage of sorts to the director of *Psycho* and was similarly overlooked by audiences. The simply titled *Giallo* (2009) received mixed reviews. The director continues to attempt to recapture his early 1970s glory years – and time will tell if he will manage it.

Above Mario Bava's *A Bay of Blood* got an early video release in Britain with the title *Blood Bath*

Right American artwork for *The Swedish ... Is the Sex Maniac*

latter. The lakeside setting and the body count approach to the picture led many to assume that the makers of the first two parts of that popular series had been more than a little inspired by Bava's film.

The cross-pollination of the subgenre continued. Many *gialli* were played at American cinemas and drive-ins and helped contribute to the fertile melting pot that gave birth to *Halloween* and the slashers of the early 1980s. There were also Spanish and Turkish films that could loosely be termed *giallo* – they were certainly trying to imitate them, including a number of Paul Naschy films such as *A Dragonfly for Each Corpse* (*Una libelula para cada muerto*, 1974).

Many *gialli* were released to British cinemas – albeit often promoting sex and nudity above their thriller aspects. The British thriller *Assault* (1971) shares many traits of the subgenre.

Perhaps it is not such a stretch to suggest that Hitchcock himself, the great master of suspense, may have been influenced by the tidal wave of violent thrillers from Italy when he directed his penultimate film, *Frenzy* (1972).

By the mid-1970s the *giallo* had all but fallen out of fashion, however. *Giallo* budgets and production values plummeted, and some even tried to spice things up by employing hard-core pornographic elements (*Play Motel*, 1979) or overemphasizing the horror and sleaze (*Giallo a Venezia*, 1979) to win back their once-loyal audiences.

The sure death knell for the genre came when spoofs – such as *Death Steps in the Dark* (*Passi di morte perduti nel buio*, 1977) – began to make an appearance. The genre has subsequently failed to repeat the huge mainstream success of its heyday of the early 1970s.

but **THIS IS AS FAR AS WE DARE TAKE YOU...**

with any hope of bringing you back!

FARLEY GRANGER
SYLVA KOSCINA
in

Only beautiful women... only if they are evil... and when they are caught in the act... he commits the *ULTIMATE BRUTALITY!*

the SLASHER

...is THE SEX MANIAC!

co-starring SUSAN SCOTT • CHRIS AVRAM

DEATH STALKS 53

DARK DAYS – AMERICAN AND BRITISH GOTHIC (1970–77)

While the slasher cinema of the early 1970s was dominated by the Italian *giallo*, in Britain and the United States the subgenre also continued to develop into what would eventually emerge as John Carpenter's seminal *Halloween*.

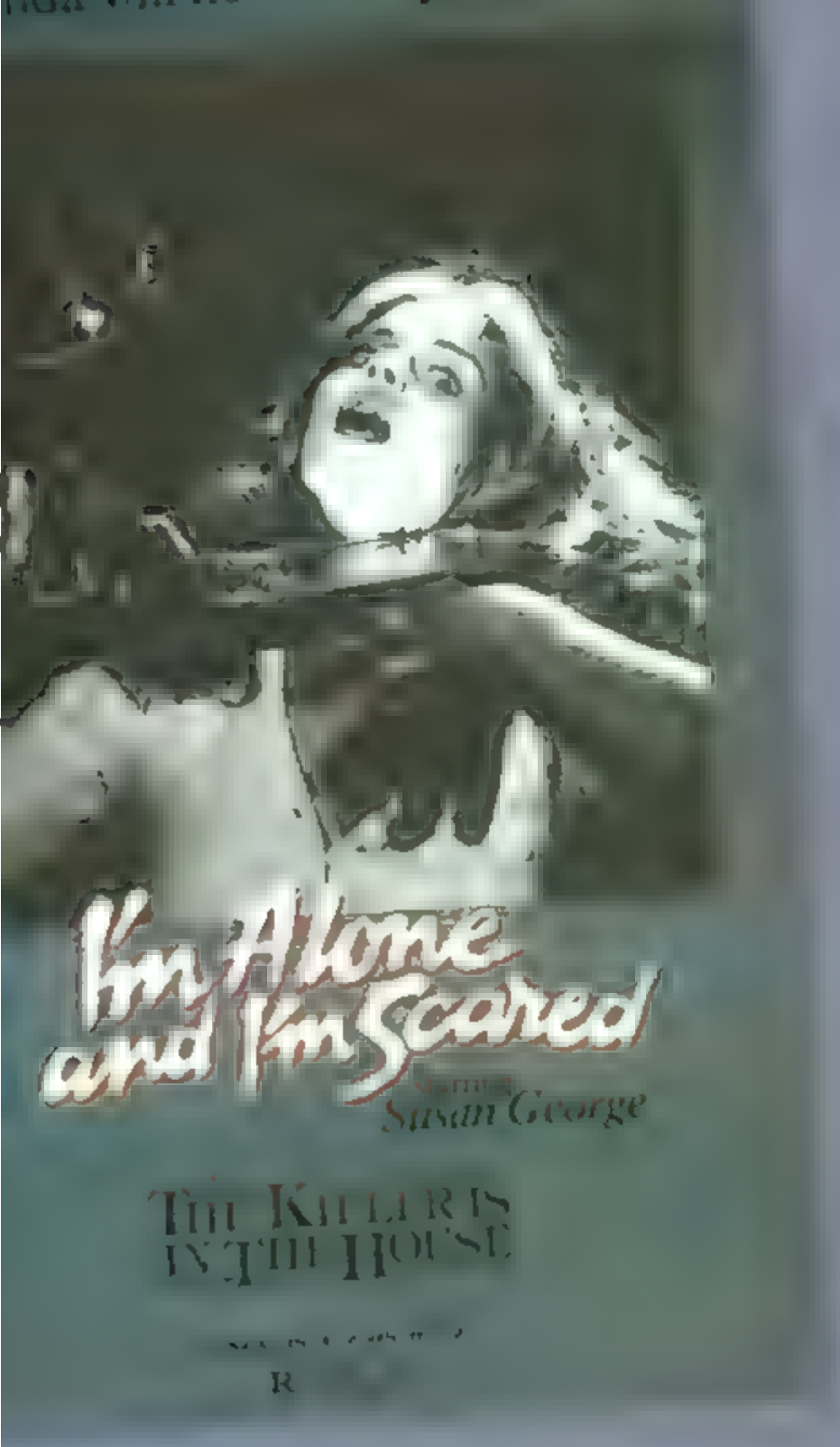
or were shown at drive-ins. Creaky plot devices were largely jettisoned, and

to grind

The period just before the Golden Age

This British psycho-thriller has two young nurses (Pamela Franklin and Michele Dotrice) taking a cycling holiday in France only to be stalked by a mysterious killer. It moves away from the gothic feel of some earlier examples of the subgenre by unravelling the sinister action in the blistering light of French daytime.

The British thriller *Fright* (1971) finds Susan George foreshadowing Jamie Lee Curtis's predicament in *Halloween*. Menaced by the psychotic father of the child for whom she's babysitting, George



the better-known cult movie of the same year, *Straw Dogs* – itself an influence on locals-versus-townies films such as *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974).

PETE WALKER

Perhaps the most influential maker of British proto-slashers was director Pete Walker. *The Flesh and Blood Show* (1972) foreshadowed Golden Age slashers, telling of a group of young actors stalked by a crazed Shakespearian thespian in a dilapidated theatre at the end of a pier. Unfortunately, by trying to satisfy both sex and gore crowds, Walker ended up pleasing neither.

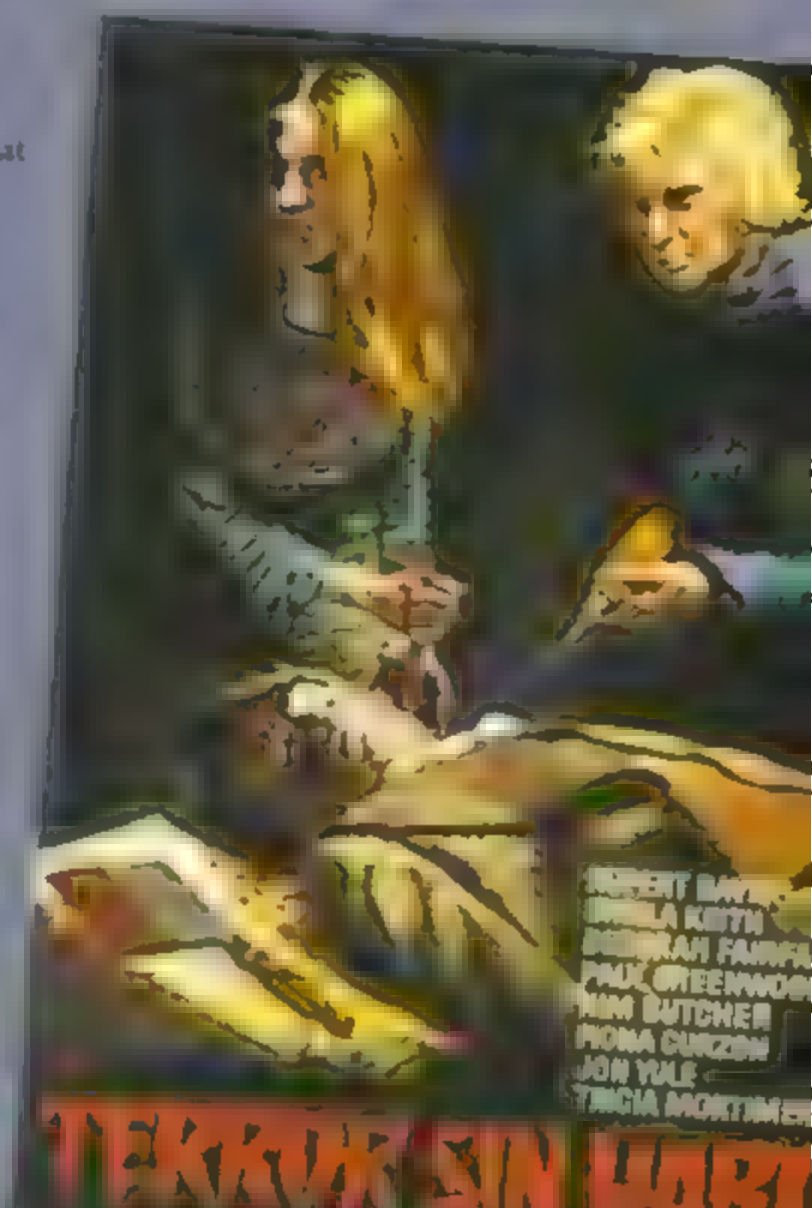
Walker's best proto-slasher came next with *Frightmare* (1974), starring the remarkable Sheila Keith as a benign elderly woman with a terrible secret – she likes to kill people with power tools and eat their flesh! *Frightmare* is a delicious exercise in nihilism and breaks many taboos of the time. On its release its film posters positively screamed the bad reviews, including 'Frighteningly well made . . . a moral obscenity!' from the *Daily Telegraph* – in an effort to draw in the crowds. Courting controversy was obviously Walker's

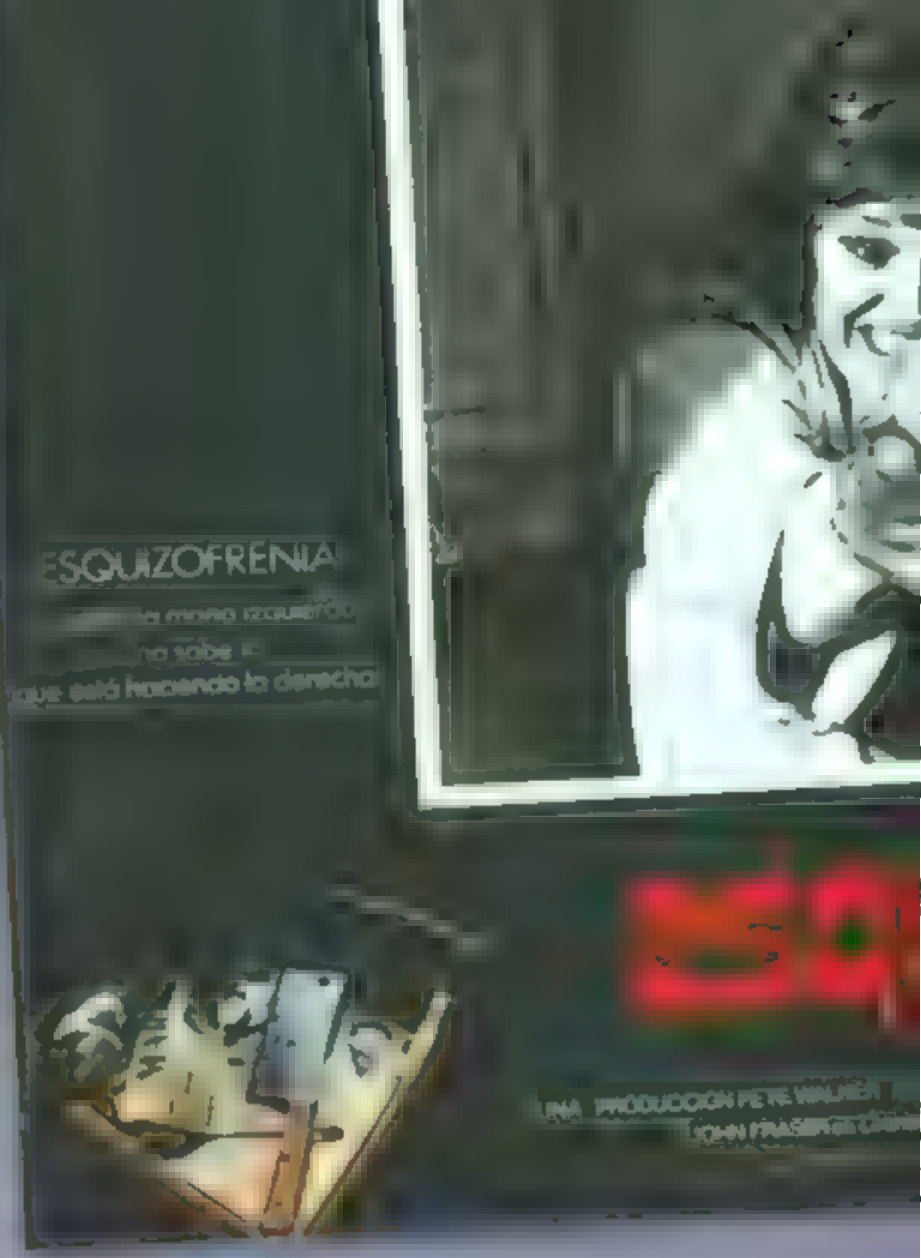
'Frighteningly well made . . . a moral obscenity!'

– *Daily Telegraph*

Left I'm Alone and [illegible] of the British proto

Below Power-tool frenzy in this Spanish artwork for *Frightmare*





Above and centre Typically outlandish artworks for Pete Walker's *House of* [illegible] and *Schizo*

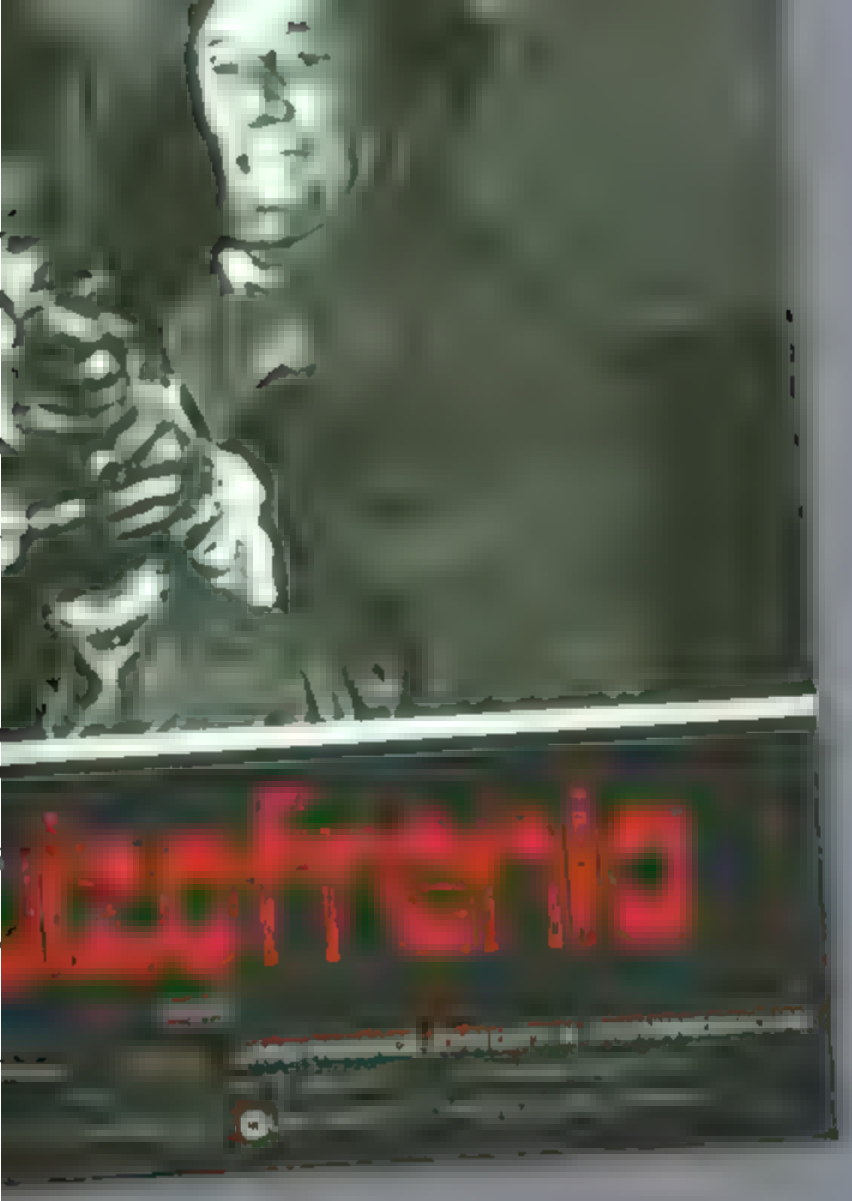
am, he believed the bigger the headlines were, the bigger the box office might be.

Again courting controversy, he tackled Catholicism next in *House of Mortal Sin* (1976) in which a young girl visiting confession triggers off obsessional behaviour in a priest, who kills people with objects of worship. In *Schizo* (also 1976),

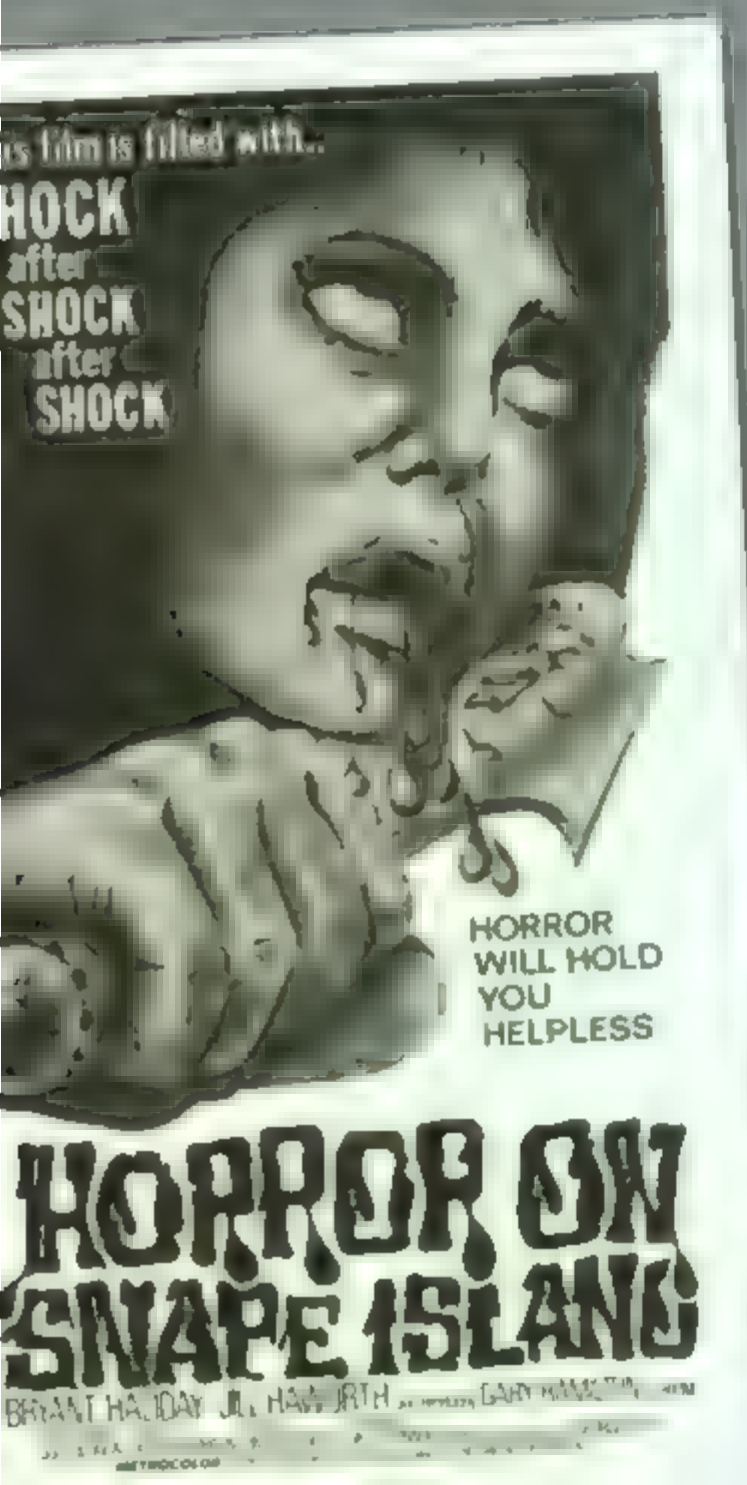
Lynne Frederick plays a young woman who thinks she's being stalked, and sure enough, bodies start hitting the floor all around her. His last slasher movie, *The Comeback* (1978), seemed positively old-fashioned compared to the same year's *Halloween* but was enlivened by the sweet yet sinister presence of Sheila Keith and a killer in a bag mask.

A TOUCH OF CLASS: THE BEST AND THE WORST OF PROPER SLASHERS

It is easy to see why the American *Blood and Lace* (1971) – not to be confused with Mario Bava's rather better-known *quello Blood and Black Lace* – was dubbed


bacteria

SHOCK
AFTER
SHOCK
as Desire
drives a
bargain
with
DEATH!
BLOOD
AND LACE


is film is filled with..
HOCK
after
SHOCK
after
SHOCK
HORROR
WILL HOLD
YOU
HELPLESS
HORROR ON
SNAPE ISLAND

There's nothing
more chilling
than a warm
family gathering.

Black Christmas

'If this picture doesn't make your skin crawl . . . it's on too tight!'

WESTWORLD

...where robot men and
women are programmed
to serve you for
...ROMANCE
...VIOLENCE
...ANYTHING

MGM Presents
"WESTWORLD" Starring YUL BRYNNER RICHARD BENJAMIN

'A theme park where lifelike robots satisfy every fantasy . . .'

in which characters do not expect their lives to be rudely interrupted by violence, things do go badly wrong in *Westworld*, and the robots turn on the guests. John Carpenter credited the virtually unstoppable homicidal humanoid – played by Yul Brynner, whose lifelike mask, once removed, is a faceless void of wires and circuitry – as an influence on his own [redacted] in *Halloween*.

Scream Bloody Murder (1973) bellowed that it was the first motion picture to be dubbed 'gore-nography'. It features a disturbed young man who is sent to an asylum after running over his father with a combine harvester and mangling his own arm. After being fitted with a hook instead of an arm by kindly nuns, he absconds and starts a murderous rampage. It is not a great film, but there are a few odd flashes of visual inspiration and almost poetic

Far left The merciless killer robot in [redacted] an inspiration for John Carpenter's *Halloween*

[redacted] *Scream Bloody*

Above: Double trouble in Brian De Palma's *Sisters*

Far right: Sex and [redacted] *The Single Girls*

AMESE TWINS AT BIRTH
What the Devil hath joined together let no man cut asunder!
"The most genuinely frightening film since Hitchcock's 'Psycho!'"
– HOLLYWOOD REPORTER
Sisters
MARGOT KIDDER · JENNIFER SALT in 'SISTERS'
CHARLES DURNING · BILL FINLEY · LISLE WILSON
Produced by Edward R. Pressman
Directed by Brian De Palma
Written by Brian De Palma and Louisa Rose
MOVIELAB An American International Release

resonance for future slashers, including one lingering image of blood running down the killer's face like tears.

Brian De Palma has often been accused of imitating Hitchcock. His psycho-thriller *Sisters* (1973), released in the same year as the hugely successful *The Exorcist*, is less of a nod and more of a head bang towards the great master's films. Margot Kidder plays two characters who were formerly Siamese twins – one psychotic, the other sweet. De Palma acknowledges his influences from the start, even using Bernard Herrmann – who scored *Psycho* – to provide the music. *Sisters* is full of what can be seen as Hitchcock clichés, but De Palma manages to put a spin on them by using split screens to represent split personalities, for example. He attempts to outdo the shower scene in *Psycho*, something that he almost pulls off.

At the other end of the spectrum is the little-known *Have a Nice Weekend* (1974), a low-budget yawner about a family reunion rocked by murders and endless sandwich making. *The Single Girls* (1974), on the other hand, is significant, as it seems to be spoofing the slasher subgenre four years before *Halloween* supposedly invented it. This semicomic effort is full of wobbly POV shots and murders with garden tools and features a killer who bumps off young women and middle-aged men at an island retreat. "I'm the Girl He Wants to Kill" (1974) was one episode in Brian Clemens's *Thriller*, a women-in-peril British TV show that was tense and suspenseful

Searching for a man was a way of life.

If they couldn't get him easy.... they got him hard....

THE SINGLE GIRLS

HALF CLAD—ALL BAD!

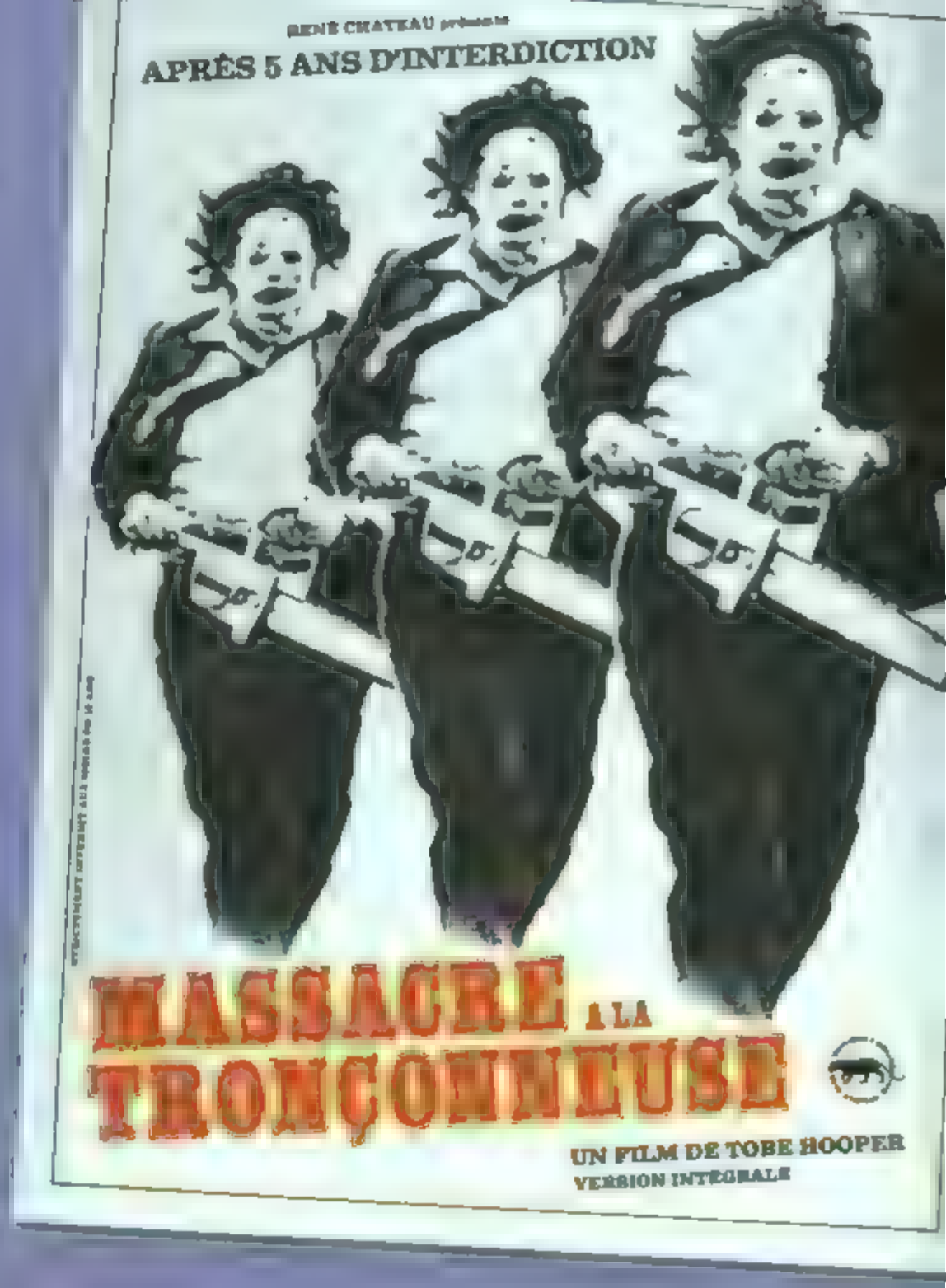
a Production of SEBASTIAN FILMS LIMITED INC. presents "THE SINGLE GIRLS" starring Claudia Jennings
Jean Marie Engels · Cheri Howell · Joan Prather · Greg Mullavey

and featured a secretary being chased around an office by a serial killer.

THE TEXAS CHAIN SAW MASSACRE AND BEYOND

Tobe Hooper's rabid and truly modern low-budget classic *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974) overshadowed *Black Christmas*. Like many of the best examples of the genre it concerns a violent clash of cultures and ideals, here the death of late 1960s hippy idealism and the darkly comedic – but terrifying – family of inbred cannibals. The film works on many levels of fear – not least that of being c[illegible]d by a squealing overweight man who is masked by skin culled from previous victims and waving a chain saw, intent on cutting and consuming his pound of flesh. Norman Bates notwithstanding, Leatherface – the film's main villain – was the first bona fide iconic proto-slasher bogeyman. Despite its fearsome reputation, the film does not show much in the way of visceral violence.

The Love Butcher (1975) was a powder-keg exploitation mix that could only have come about in the mid-1970s, a time when, just before the punk movement broke, boundaries were being tested and political correctness was, for the most part, unthinkable. In the film, an ugly gardener has a handsome alter ego who punishes the housewives who have previously spurned him. At its heart, a black comedy with dubious sexual politics, the film anticipates later slashers, as the killer, who would be at home in any number of later films in the subgenre, finds lethal uses for household objects and has a confrontation with a Final Girl.



'That's the last goddam hitchhiker I ever pick up.'

– Jerry, *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*

during a trip to the country. Although it does remarkably anticipate elements in many later films, such as the masked bends in *Halloween* and the *Friday the 13th* franchises, it is an awkward mixture of sex and thriller elements. Made in 1976, it isn't hard to see why this film sat on the shelf until 1981, when it was released to try to cash in on the slasher boom.

Somewhat better is the evocatively titled *The Town That Dreaded Sundown* (1976), a rare example of a period slasher. Set in Texas in the 1940s, it is based on the real-life, unsolved murders of five people. In the film, the killer is depicted stalking lovelorn teenagers with a burlap sack over his head – the disguise seemingly borrowed by the makers of *Friday the 13th Part 2*. Marred by jarring lurches into comedy, there is, however, a striking murder using a trombone as a deadly weapon!

A killer runs rampant at a college campus in the largely inept *Another Son of Sam* (1977). It was titled to cash in on the real-life Son of Sam murders, which were the work of deranged serial killer David Berkowitz, who terrorized New York City at the time. Despite an evidently low budget, some of the scenes nicely evoke the suburban streets of John Carpenter's soon-to-be-released *Halloween*. The film also includes plenty of POV shots, such as the old hand-comes-into-view-and-pulls-down-a-branch shot.

Wes Craven took another sub at the subgenre after his 1972 attempt, *The Last House on the Left*, when he pitched a middle-class family against cannibalistic desert mutants in *The Hills Have Eyes* (1977). Like *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* before it, the terror was partially generated by the fish-out-of-water suburban victims menaced by those outside civilization.

However, in 1978 it was John Carpenter and producer Debra Hill who really shook things up when they brought real horror directly into the heart of middle-class suburban America with *Halloween*. The modern slasher movie, as we know it today, was born with that iconic film, and the Golden Age of slashers, which lasted six glorious and gory years, also began

A TRUE STORY

THE TOWN THAT DISAPPEARED

Charles R. Burns

IN 1926 THIS MAN KILLED FIVE PEOPLE.
TODAY HE STILL WORKS THE STREETS OF TEXARKANA, ARK.

DARK DAYS

THE GOLDEN AGE OF THE SLASHER (1978–84)

It was disco death on the terror train that dripped blood on prom night. Teenagers flocked to watch replicas of themselves die in ever-more creative ways, as the pop-culture phenomenon continued to explode onto screens across the world.

The Golden Age of the slasher began in [illegible] but it was not the horror [illegible] had in mind for it with [illegible] John Carpenter's film was not released in America until just before the Halloween of 1978, and it was not released in most international territories until 1979. Its success, and that of *Friday the 13th* a few years later, [illegible] wannabes, rip-offs and riffs on the same theme. The period until 1984 is considered the greatest for the slasher film by many fans. Certainly it is a prolific period in the subgenre, during which over 100 slashers were released. Some were undeniable [illegible] but others are [illegible] fondly regarded today [illegible] *Terror Train* to *My Bloody Valentine*, [illegible] *Graduation Day* to *Slumber Party Massacre*. Many of the [illegible] follow.

During this six-year period, the allure of the slasher, for particularly wily producers and directors, was to be able to make [illegible] – and [illegible] without [illegible] backers' nerves. As a [illegible] made hundreds of [illegible] American box [illegible] see "[illegible] at the Box Office" on page 82) [illegible] and most [illegible] to point.

When these [illegible] rates they are [illegible] *Halloween* would have made $144,213,675 and *Friday the 13th* $121,982,066. Even a [illegible] have [illegible] impressive [illegible]

Most of these [illegible] murders but [illegible] Carpenter's [illegible] simple template of [illegible] murder as [illegible] the writers and [illegible] put their own [illegible] degree of success. As a result of [illegible] to bring [illegible] give them more [illegible]

'Bit by bit . . . by bit he carved a nightmare!'

– *The Toolbox Murders*

other words, subsequent slasher movie filmmakers exploited and expanded on what had gone before. In the wake of *Halloween*, this meant – not to put too fine a point on it – more boobs and more blood. While critics generally praised *Halloween* for its restraint, its more exploitative elements were seized with gusto by filmmakers who wanted their slice of the slasher movie pie. They mixed stage blood, nudity, scares – and often cheese – in a crowd-pleasing way that is so often missing from today's anaemic genre offerings.

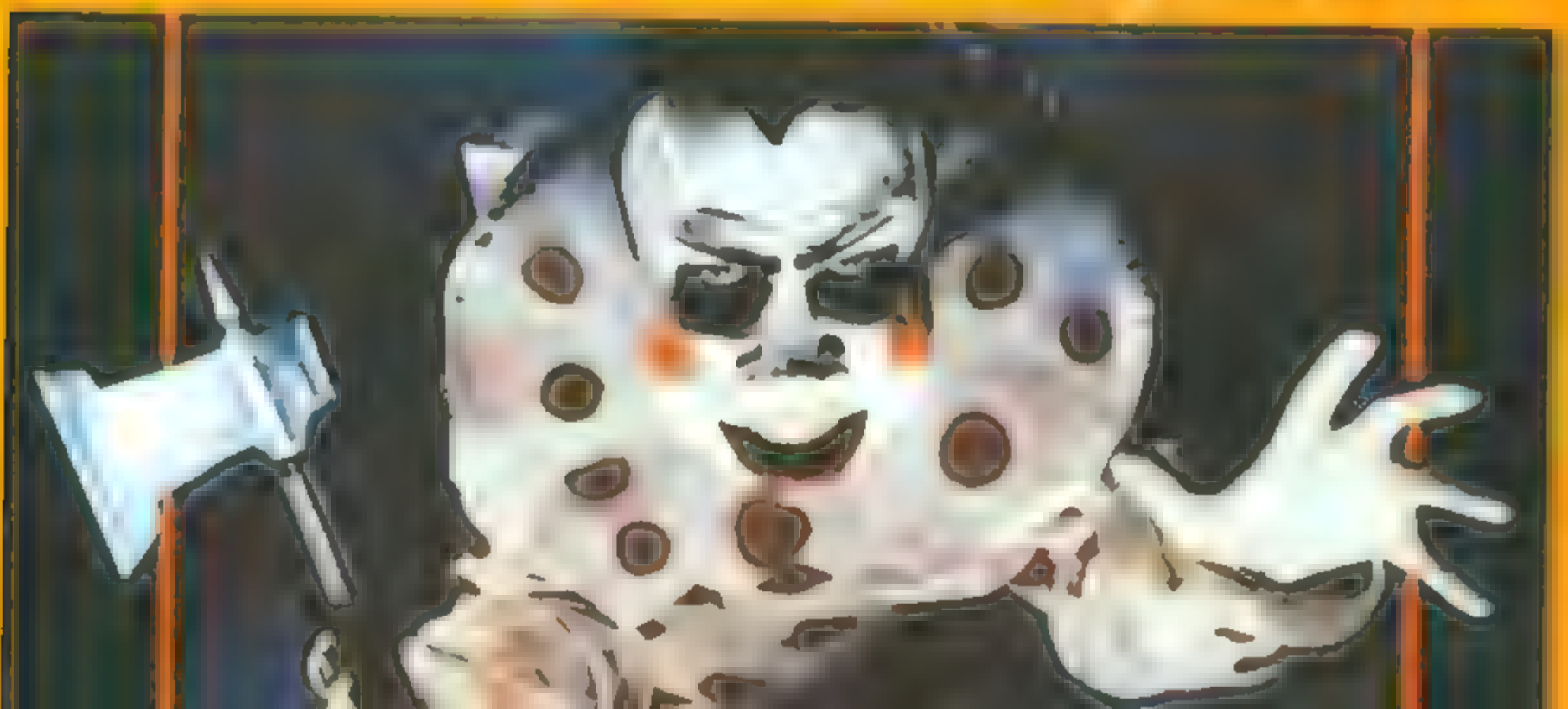
The explosion of the slasher movie was [illegible] but not exclusively – an American and Canadian phenomena. Teenagers (and those pretending to be teens) were sliced and diced in droves in high schools, dorms, summer camps and night schools. It's a wonder that a whole generation didn't just vanish in a blur of corn syrup, flashing blades and Farrah Fawcett hair.

Of course, *Halloween* may have kicked off this tidal wave of crimson, but it was not created in a cultural vacuum as this book shows. While I begin this chapter by looking at this iconic movie, I will also review it in the context of other key films of the Golden Age.

BATTLE OF THE SEXES

Despite women shedding their clothes in classic slasher movies, when up against a psycho with a machete, men were more at risk. In the 175 slasher films made between 1978 and 1984, some 558 of the 1,046 on-screen fatalities were male as opposed to 488 female deaths.

Below: In the Golden Age there was no escape for anyone. A not very friendly town advertised *The Funhouse*.



1978 – *HALLOWEEN* AND THE NIGHT HE CAME HOME

The Golden Age began in 1978 when John Carpenter created what is arguably the perfect horror movie. *Halloween* secured Carpenter's future and launched the career of its young star, Jamie Lee Curtis.

Above Donald Pleasence as Dr Loomis in *Halloween*

Influenced by a myriad of sources as diverse as the *giallo Blood and Black Lace*, the sci-fi film *Westworld* and the proto-slasher *Black Christmas*, *Halloween* would become the genre-defining work with only the slightest plot. The story centres around the murder by a six-year-old boy of his teenage sister on Halloween in 1963. Fifteen years later, the now adult Michael Myers breaks out of the asylum to return to his hometown of Haddonfield to resume his rampage on All Hallows Eve. His victims seemingly chosen at random, are three high school girls. The increasingly crazed psychiatrist, Dr Loomis, who had fought to keep him locked away for life, pursues Myers.

Irwin Yablans, one of the film's eventual executive producers, came up with the idea, originally thinking that it might

'What was living behind that boy's eyes was purely and simply . . . "evil".'

– Dr. Loomis on Michael Myers, *Halloween*

centre around babysitters terrorized by a psychopath (the project was originally titled *The Babysitter Murders*). Wanting to keep costs to a minimum, Yablans decided the film should take place over just one day and night. He chose to use Halloween the scariest night of the year.

HALLOWEEN
The Night He Came Home!

Britain praises art in the Hollywood

Yesterday we already published what Carpenter had to say about the making of Halloween. We also published extracts from reviews of the film in the British and American press. Now we have received from Mr Carpenter a letter in which he comments on the reviews and makes some points about the film which he feels have been misunderstood.

Before Mr Carpenter's letter is published we would like to make a few points about the film. Halloween is not a horror film in the sense that it is not a film about the supernatural. It is a film about a man who is a psychopath and who kills people. Dr Loomis is not a psychiatrist. He is a doctor who is trying to help the boy. Michael Myers is not a monster. He is a human being who is sick.

Before Mr Carpenter's letter is published we would like to make a few points about the film. Halloween is not a horror film in the sense that it is not a film about the supernatural. It is a film about a man who is a psychopath and who kills people. Dr Loomis is not a psychiatrist. He is a doctor who is trying to help the boy. Michael Myers is not a monster. He is a human being who is sick.

the souls are let out to wreak havoc on the living, and then came up with the story about the most evil kid who ever lived. We didn't want it to be gory. We wanted it to be like a jack in the box.

It was these unashamed popcorn thrills that explains part of the reason why the film eventually resonated so powerfully with movie-goers. It was *the* golden formula aped by pretty much every slasher filmmaker who followed in Carpenter's giant footsteps.

The film was budgeted at a modest $300,000. Carpenter also agreed to write, direct, compose and perform the soundtrack for just $10,000 and a percentage of the profits. Backing was eventually secured from Arab financier Moustapha Akkad, who went on to be involved in all the *Halloween* sequels until his death in 2005.

Jamie Lee Curtis was chosen to play the virginal but ultimately resourceful Laurie Strode, partly because she was the daughter of *Psycho* star Janet Leigh. Carpenter had offered the role of Dr Loomis to Peter Cushing and Christopher Lee, who both turned it down (although Lee later said that was the biggest regret of his career); instead, it went to another great British thespian, Donald Pleasence. P.J. Soles had impressed Carpenter so much in *Carrie* (1976) that he had written the part of Laurie's classmate Lynda with her in mind. Nancy Kyes filled out the trio of ill-fated students as Annie.

'To make Myers frightening, I had him walk like a man, not a monster.'

– John Carpenter

Below: Michael Myers haunts the night in *Halloween*

Right Japanese promotional artwork for *Halloween* and *(far right)* alternative American artwork

Halloween began shooting what was to be a tight and problematic four-week schedule in May 1978. Although set in the Midwest in autumn, it was actually filmed in California in the spring. Despite the trees being noticeably full and green, the production team used bags of specially painted brown leaves to give the right autumnal feel.

Playing the soon-to-be-iconic screen monster Michael Myers was Nick Castle – Carpenter's friend and budding director Castle – who went on to direct the anaemic quasi slasher *TAG: The Assassination Game* (1982) – was the face of the adult Myers in all but one shot at the end of the film, when he is eventually unmasked. The look of Carpenter's 'the Shape' – the almost mythic figure who emerges from the darkness to claim his victims like a malevolent spider – could have ended up looking very different. Tommy Wallace – who was in charge of production design on the film – was sent to get the perfect mask for the role. The two choices were a clown and one made from a likeness of *Star Trek* actor William Shatner with the eyeholes cut larger and sprayed white. The moment he saw the Shatner mask, Carpenter knew that he had found the look for his bogeyman.

Perhaps the film's most famous scene is the opening shot of six-year-old Michael stalking his sister, who has just had sex with her boyfriend, through the Myers home. The POV shot was achieved using a Panaglide camera that mimicked natural

HALLOWEEN

The trick is to stay alive.

Everyone is entitled to one good scare.

Above: Spanish promotional artwork for *Halloween* and right: Japanese artwork for the same movie

movement. Michael's hands were, in fact, those of Debra Hill's Wale, looking as it was filmed in one continuous shot – it was actually three shots cleverly edited together. Despite bearing a remarkable similarity to the opening sequence of the earlier *Blood and Lace* (see page 58), as already discussed, it is powerful and stylish, setting the scene both thematically and visually for what was to come. This is due largely to the exquisite cinematography of Dean Cundey, who went on to work on many of Carpenter's subsequent films, including *The Fog* (1980) and *The Thing* (1982).

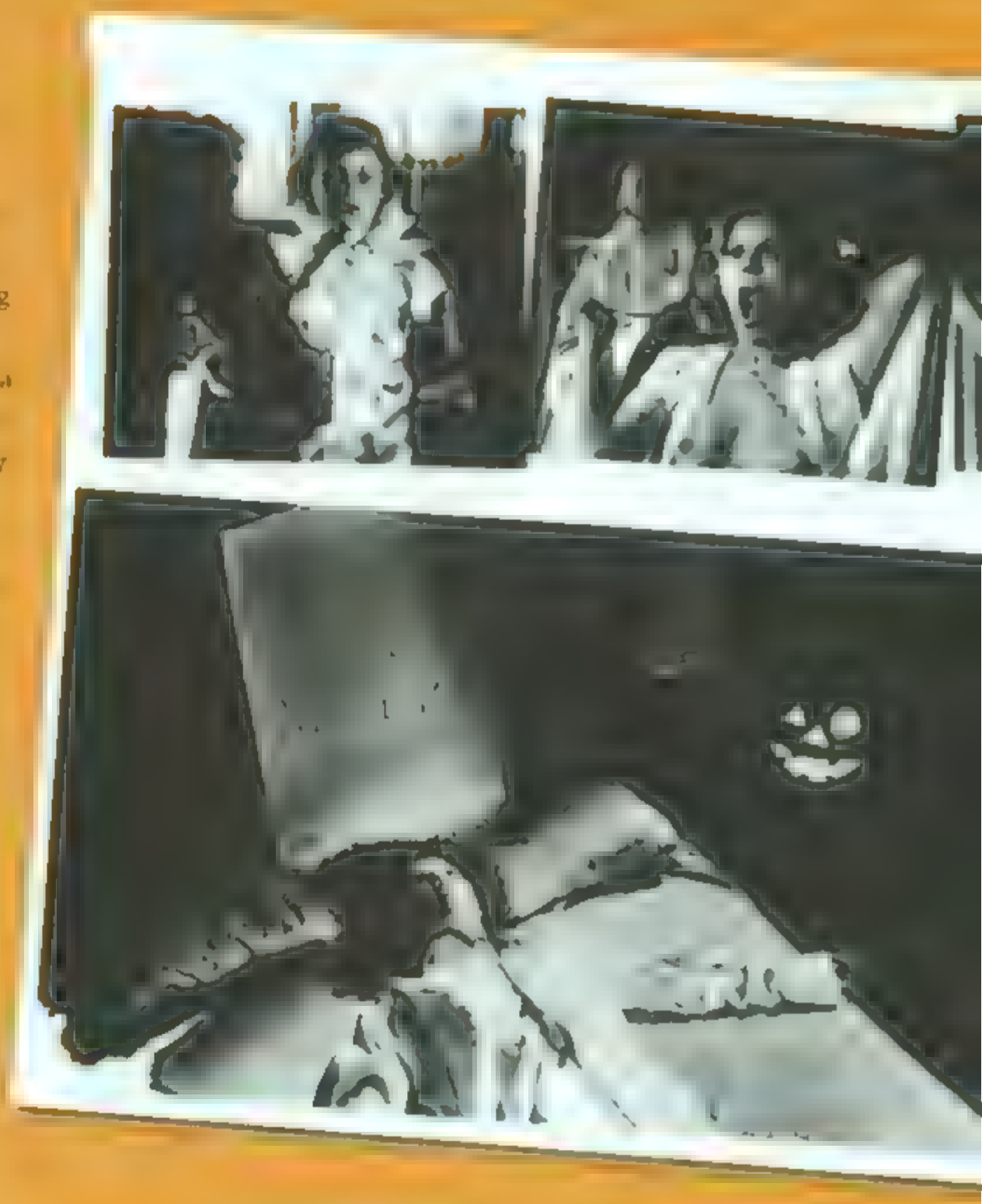
The horror genre has always mixed sex and violence, and *Halloween* is no exception. Although it is true that the virgin heroine survives while her sexually adventurous friends die, Carpenter on one hand denies that there is a conservative political agenda at play, and states that sex-obsessed teenagers just pay less attention to their own personal safety. He has also said that Myers represents the revenge of the repressed. Whatever the truth, subsequent filmmakers have piled what appeared to be a sex-equals-death mantra

primarily because sex and death sell already compelling combination that seems almost too obvious. Surprisingly, *Halloween* very nearly didn't become a big-screen subgenre defining film. Every major Hollywood studio – the same studios that would be rushing to claim their slice of the slasher movie pie in the coming few years – declined to distribute it. In fact Yablans scheduled a preview with them and invited all the studios, but none even turned up. Carpenter showed it to an [illegible] 20th Century Fox minus the music score; she said that it just wasn't scary. Carpenter quickly realized that his minimal – and soon to become highly imitated – electronic score was the magic ingredient that perfectly complemented the visuals, helping generate ever-building fear and suspense.

Yablans decided to distribute the film via his own company, Compass International Pictures. Unlike most major films of today *Halloween* debuted on limited release starting in Kansas City in October 1978, it opened in four theatres, at first causing few ripples at the box office. However, word of mouth proved to be the film's saviour. When it opened at the Chicago Film Festival in November 1978, the film literally exploded both commercially and critically.

Initially, not all the critics were positive. Influential *New Yorker* film critic Pauline Kael was scathing. However, her voice was in the minority. Tom Allen of the *Village Voice* said the film could stand proud next to [illegible] *The Exorcist* and Hitchcock's [illegible] Forty-four years later – when we look back to [illegible] *Halloween* now years later – praised the film as totally original, compelling and said that it would compare with the classic slasher *Psycho*.

Halloween became a box-office phenomenon. It was one of the most profitable independent releases of all time with an incredible $70 million world gross.



The night HE came home.

Below British video artwork for *Savage Water*

Far right American poster art for *The Toolbox Murders*.

on its original release. It also unwittingly unleashed a tidal wave of blood that [illegible] screen for the next six years and beyond.

OTHER FILMS RELEASED IN 1978

Before we get to the films that followed and emulated *Halloween*, let's take a look at some of the slashers that also appeared in that year. While many TV movies take their inspiration from big-screen successes, *Are You in the House Alone?* was first screened in American movie theatres just ahead of *Halloween*. Starring small-screen regular Kathleen Beller, it anticipated that film with its babysitter-in-peril motif, but the phantom phone calls suggest that *Black Christmas* (see pages 60–61) might have been its inspiration. As with many films with slasher elements from around this time, they often catch modern viewers off guard, since the template for the slasher that we know and love had not yet been set.

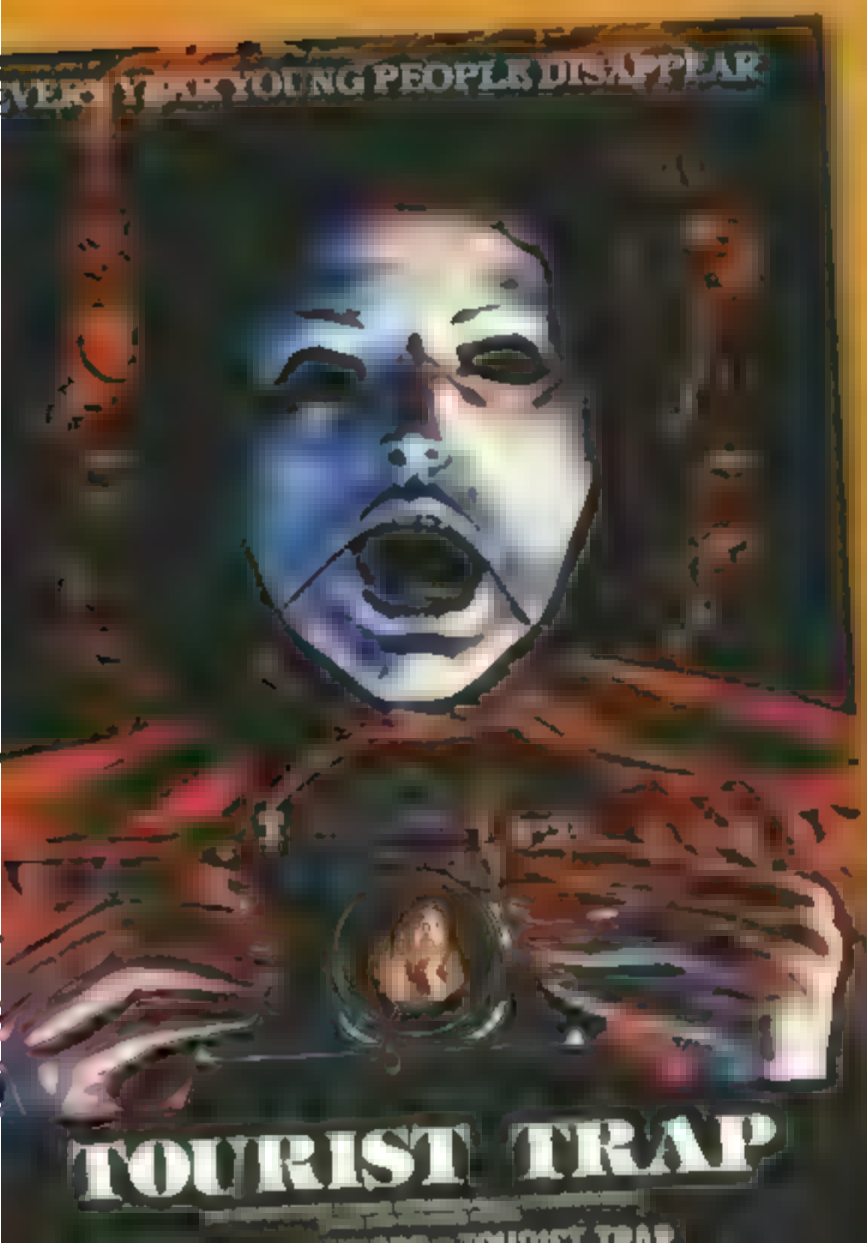
Filmed in 1977 and released in March 1978, *The Toolbox Murders* has something of a fearsome reputation. Ostensibly based on a true story, it was actually the success of a re-release of *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* that was the real genesis for the film. Sadly, it has none of the raw power of Tobe Hooper's film and none of the elegance of *Halloween*. What it does share with the latter film is psychotic evil exploding in suburbia – a deranged manager (played with relish by subgenre regular Cameron Mitchell) kills women in an apartment complex. But despite its sensationalist title, *The Toolbox Murders* is largely a tedious exercise in nonsuspense. As with *Are You in the House Alone?*, only the beginning section of the movie could be regarded as having true slasher elements.

While *Halloween* undeniably marked 1978 as the watershed year in the slasher genre, it also gave birth to what is possibly the worst slasher ever made – *Savage Water*. With a less-than-thrilling tale of boating on the white-water rapids of the Colorado River and murder and mayhem among a group of tourists, the film never gained a release in North America.

BIT BY BIT...BY BIT HE CARVED A NIGHTMARE!

1979 – THE SLASHER COMES INTO ITS OWN

Perhaps surprisingly – given today's market, in which imitators of a potentially popular film can hit the shelves even before the original comes out – the opportunity to make money off the popularity of *Halloween* wasn't taken up by would-be slasher filmmakers as quickly as might be expected. Although many slashers went into production in 1979, they only really saw the light of day in 1980.



The flood of films began with the *Tourist Trap*

The most successful slasher film released in 1979 was undoubtedly *David Schechter's Tourist Trap*. The plot of this low-budget thriller was centred on a wax museum whose owner is a psychopathic serial killer. However the film quickly reverses this as the teens are preyed by a mask-wearing killer and obvious nod to *Halloween* and the supernatural's animated mannequins controlled by the

museum were created by [illegible] *Tourist Trap* also featured [illegible] such as Chuck Connors [illegible] that supposedly took [illegible] the exploitation genre to the next [illegible] Jed Mahaffey. Although [illegible] the thrills [illegible] to [illegible] them but [illegible] through the [illegible] The [illegible] who prays [illegible] proceedings [illegible] today's standards however.

Roy Dotrice [illegible] *Tourist Trap* [illegible] *Hallowe'en* [illegible] has been set [illegible] has been [illegible]

achas asesinadas
a... ¿cuantas
próxima?

LICIAS DE UN AS

JAMES LUSI • SUSAN SULLIVAN • JOHN KARLEN • MARTIN SPEER • HILARIE THOMPSON
JEREMY HOENACK & MARALYN THOMA JEREMY HOENACK MARALYN THOMA

HOLLYWOOD STRANGLER

SKID ROW SLASHER

GOLDEN AGE 81

Video artwork for The Hollywood Strangler Meets the Skid Row Slasher

STRANGLER

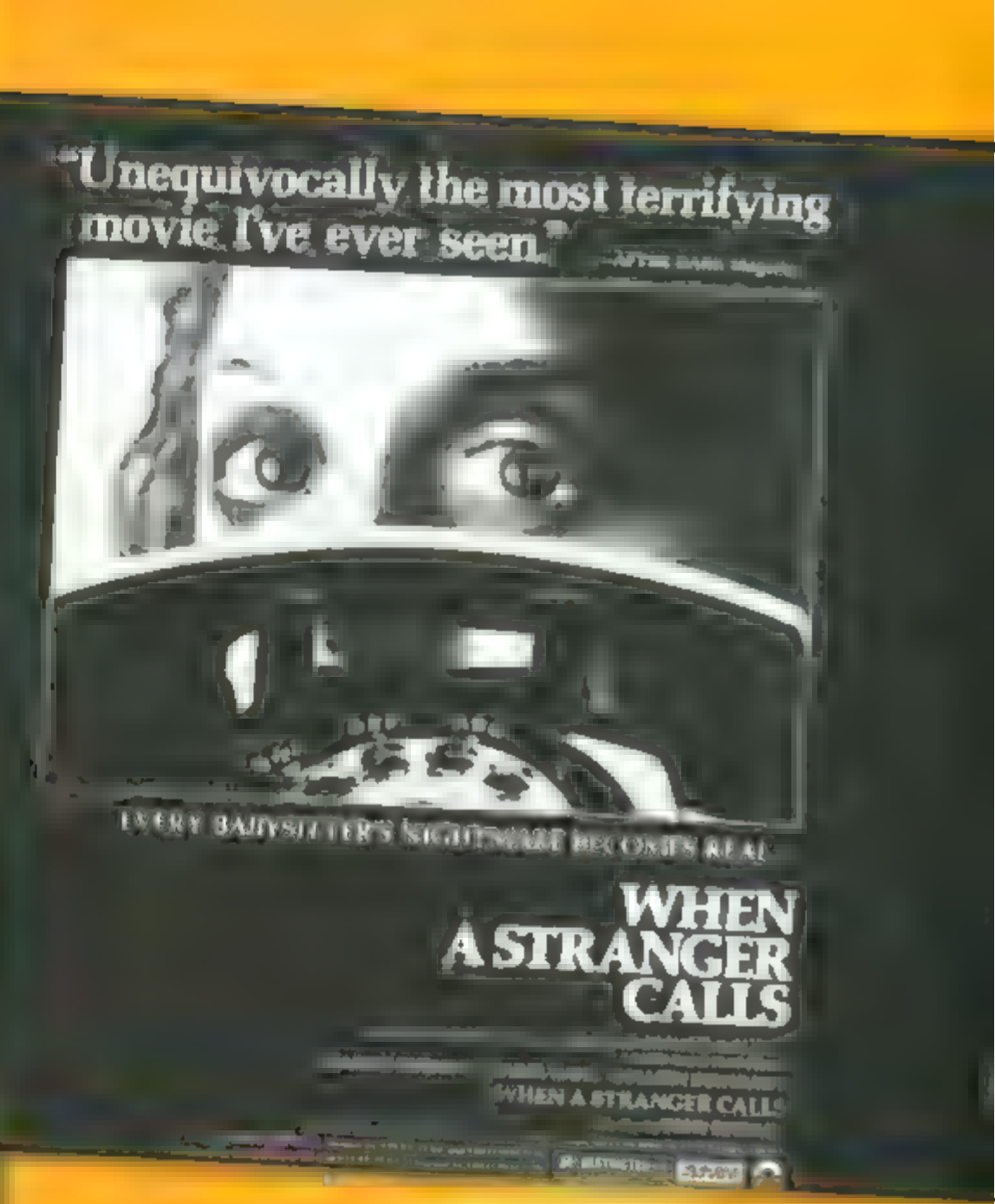
MEETS THE

Fangoria Magazine sez
"Tortured Thoughts"
"Genuine Sleeze"
—Thom Brickshaw

SKID ROW

SLASHER

NO ONE IS SAFE!


"Unequivocally the most terrifying movie I've ever seen."
EVERY BABYSITTER'S NIGHTMARE BECOMES REAL
WHEN A STRANGER CALLS
WHEN A STRANGER CALLS

Based on
sequence *The Sitter*
Alone and *When a*
Stranger Calls

Fine Gibbs
Linda Blair is Halloween
Night Ivy and
Jamie Lee Curtis in
Halloween Twenty

'Every babysitter's nightmare becomes real . . .'

– When a Stranger Calls

THE FINAL GIRL

Ever since Laurie Strode turned from shrinking wallflower to resourceful heroine in *Halloween*, it has become almost a cliché that a lone woman will be the only one left standing at the end of a slasher. Before *Halloween*, heroines had survived horror movies, but the climactic battle between Laurie and the bogeyman was a veritable blueprint of what was to follow. Sometimes there was a Final Boy (Alfred in *The Burning*), but that was a rarity.

The Final Girl (FG, as she became known) was, more often than not, a virgin (unlike most of her doomed friends). Shy but ultimately resourceful, she turns cat-and-mouse games to her advantage in her battle to make it to the closing credits. In many ways, the FG has taken over the role of the traditional male hero in slashers. Men are either relegated as machete fodder or fall by the wayside before the climactic battle ensues between the FG and the killer. While many aren't averse to screaming like banshees, they are also handy with a chainsaw or at hotwiring a getaway car.

Bucking the trend, some FGs – such as the one in *The Dorm That Dripped Blood* – make it through the movie but, in a cruel but ironic twist of fate, fall at the finish line. However, even if the FG does make it through to the end in one piece, there is sadly no guarantee that she will live through the sequel.

In the end, the resourceful, likeable and often androgynous FG appeals to both male and female viewers, and she continues to rise to the challenge of survival to this very day.

1980 – SUCCESS AND THE SLASHER

This was the year that the slasher movie really exploded into the public consciousness, with the incredible financial success of *Friday the 13th*.

Right Promotional artwork for *Silent Scream*.

The original Final Girl Jamie Lee Curtis told *Boxoffice* magazine that she thought the success of the slasher movie was a reaction to the 'boring' 1970s, saying, 'Watching people running from danger negates some of the apathy, even if it is only for 90 minutes'. However, this was also the year that former Hollywood star Ronald Reagan was elected as the 40th president of the United States – ushering in a new age of conservatism in America – and John Lennon was assassinated outside his apartment building in New York. The debate about the representation of women on-screen and the use of violence as entertainment also erupted, manifesting itself on the streets in the form of protests and boycotts. The slasher movie, at the height of its commercial powers, unwittingly found itself at the centre of this political and cultural maelstrom.

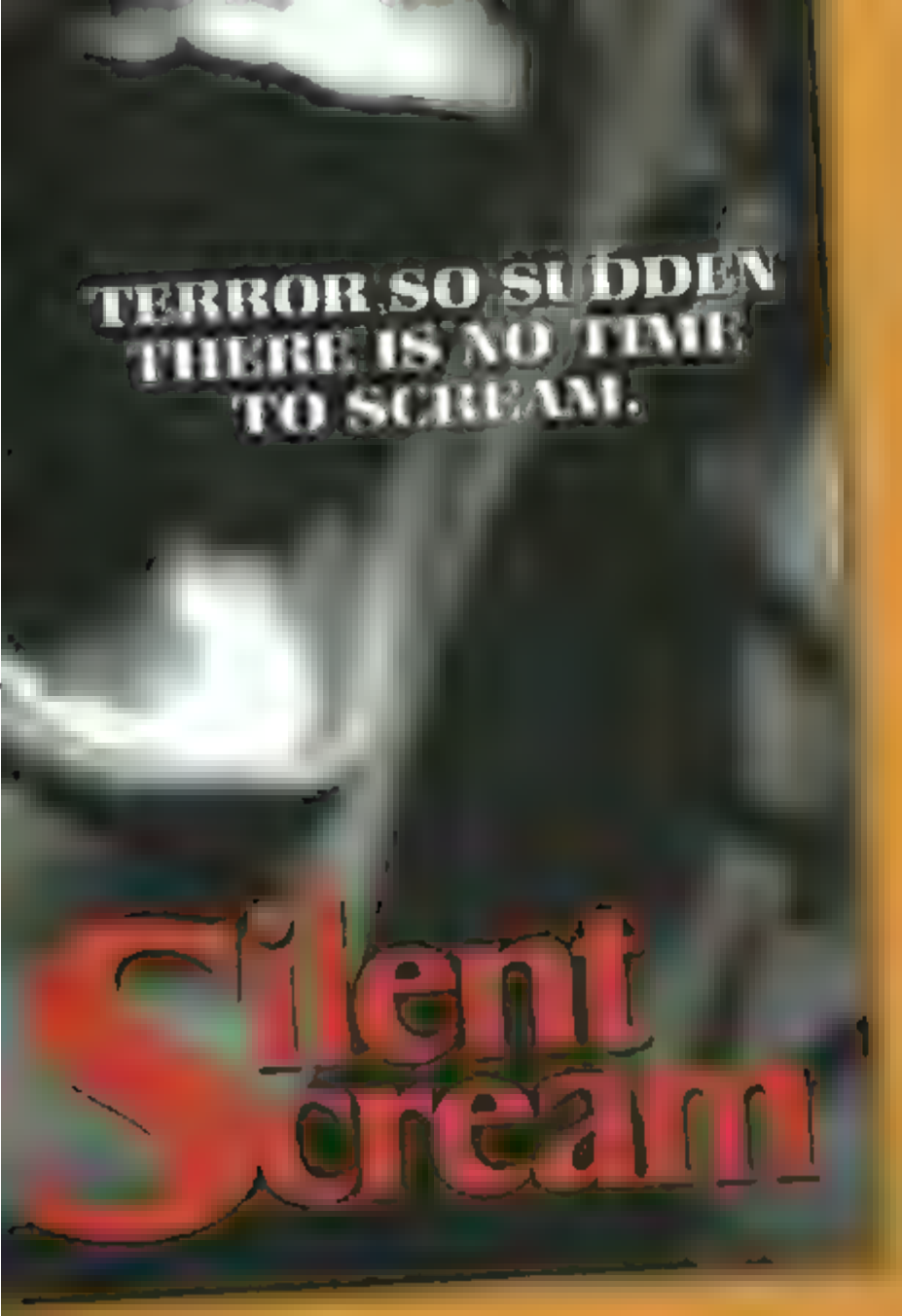
COURTING CONTROVERSY

Among the first films to appear in 1980 was the curiously meek *Silent Scream*, which looked back to the heyday of one of its stars – English actress Barbara Steele, who had been the queen of Italian gothic horror in the 1960s – as much as it aped contemporary slasher movies. Steele plays a lobotomized ex-teen queen who escapes from the attic of a boarding house to carve up the students living there. It scared up a very respectable $15,800,000 at the domestic box office

'If you're not back by midnight, you won't be coming home!'

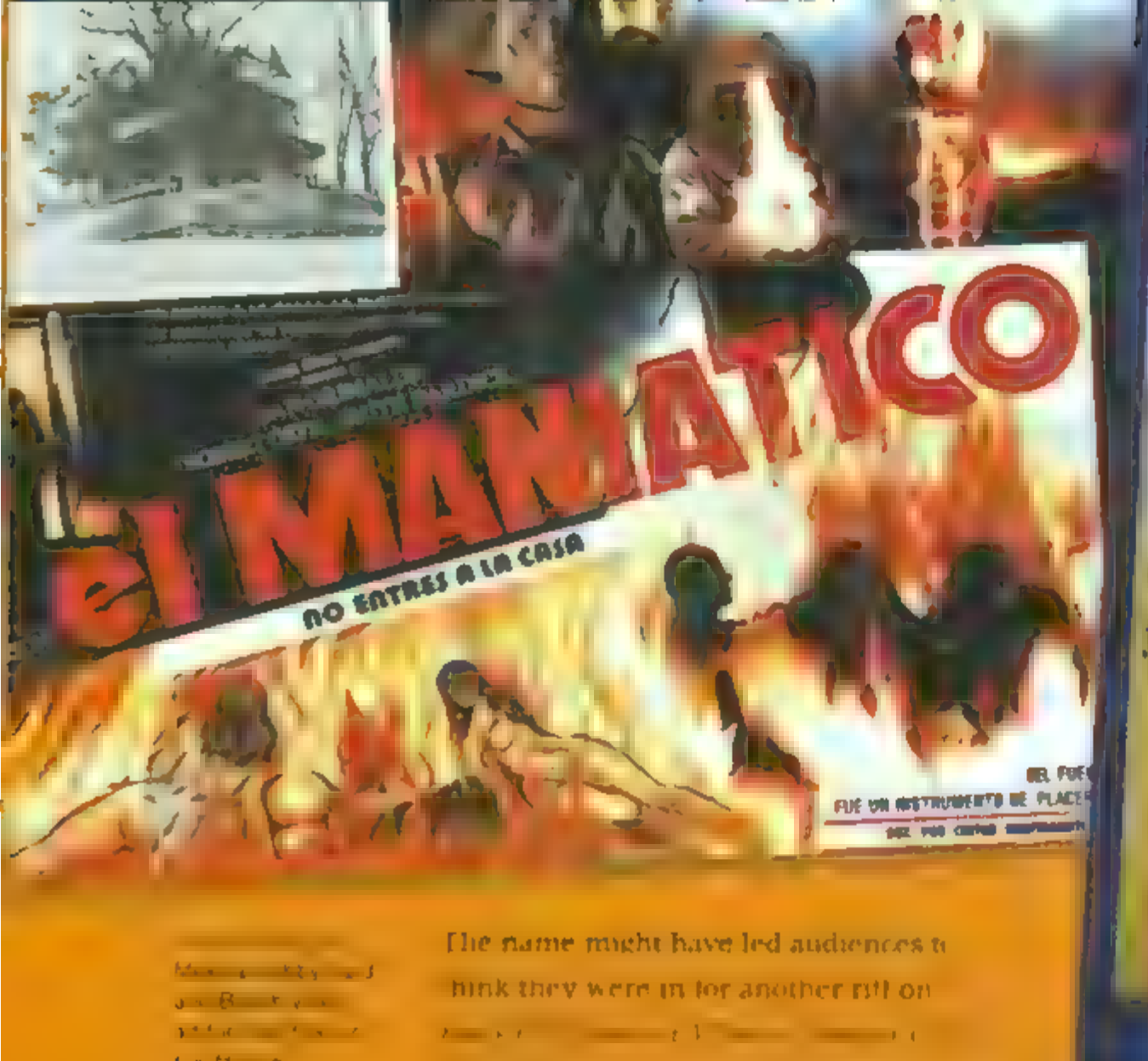
– Prom Night

Two high-profile and thematically similar thrillers with slasher movie elements opened in early 1980. *Cruising* was directed by William Friedkin – most famous for directing *The Exorcist* (1973). Al Pacino plays a New York City cop sent undercover to catch the killer, who lurks in the city's leather bars. Featuring several brutal knife murders that wouldn't have looked out



[illegible] Artwork for *Don't Answer the Phone*

[illegible] of place and [illegible] attracted controversy to make the [illegible] Some [illegible] were [illegible] by protests [illegible] community who were [illegible] the way they were being portrayed in the [illegible] A [illegible] that the [illegible] and [illegible] [illegible] to be raped so that she can be at her most [illegible] and [illegible] who gets between them. The [illegible] or explained [illegible] or [illegible] [illegible] boundaries [illegible] and [illegible] are [illegible] by [illegible] groups [illegible] but for a [illegible] protest [illegible] $[illegible]22s when [illegible] made just $2,129,[illegible] Carnage on the decades [illegible] to use [illegible] with [illegible] the exploitative elements [illegible] and nudity [illegible] screen showing [illegible] sleaze of many [illegible] slasher movies made [illegible] previously. *Don't Answer the Phone* [illegible] the secondary [illegible] level [illegible] this multiple series were [illegible] apart from the titles



The name might have led audiences t
hink they were in for another riff on
with a repellent Vietnam
rt (Nicholas Worth) strangling lingerie-
ad women in Los Angeles and then
mutilating their bodies. Rather than create
pathetic characters – in the way that a
him such as *Halloween* does, for example –
t seems solely to dwell on the suffering of
he exclusively female victims while also
attempting to titillate the audience.

Much better, but no less grim, was
Joseph Ellison's psychological terror
movie, *Don't Go in the House*, where Danny
Dan Grimaldi), who was abused by his
mother as a child, loses his mind upon her
death and traps and sets fire to women in
specially constructed metal room. Like
Norman Bates, Danny continues to hear
his mother's voice – her
him
and
some theatres at the sam
the 13th, although the fo
madness and th
was an altogether
gives *Psycho* a grindhouse mak
one scene the camera
writhes graphically in the flames whil
hanging in chains from the ceilin
Perhaps unsurprisingly, *Don't G*
House was prosecuted as a 'video nas
the United Kingdon

FRIDAY THE 13TH AND THE TURNING OF THE TIDE

Adrienne King as Barbara Bates in *Friday the 13th* was the archetypal pot-smoking, horny teen victim

Brian Bloom as Jason Voorhees in a tweak for *Night of the Demon*

'Doomed! You're all doomed!'

– Crazy Ralph, *Friday the 13th*

Video artwork for
Christmas Evil
© Anchor Bay

THE CANADIAN BOOM

If you're not back by midnight... you won't be coming home!
EL INVITADO DEL DIABLO
HOME SWEET HOME
JAKE STEINFELD
GALLEE ELYSE
COLLETTE TRUGE

Riding on the coattails of *Friday the 13th Part Eight* was a sizable hit, raking in nearly $15 million on a modest budget of just $1.6 million.

DE PALMA AND *DRESSED TO KILL*

Brian De Palma had already veered into proto-slasher territory with *Sisters*. A noted follower of Hitchcock as well as Stanley Kubrick (who had directed the cerebral Stephen King psycho-shocker *The Shining* in the same year), De Palma was one of the first mainstream directors to see the cinematic potential of mixing the now traditional spills of the psycho-thriller with the contemporary edge of the modern slasher movie.

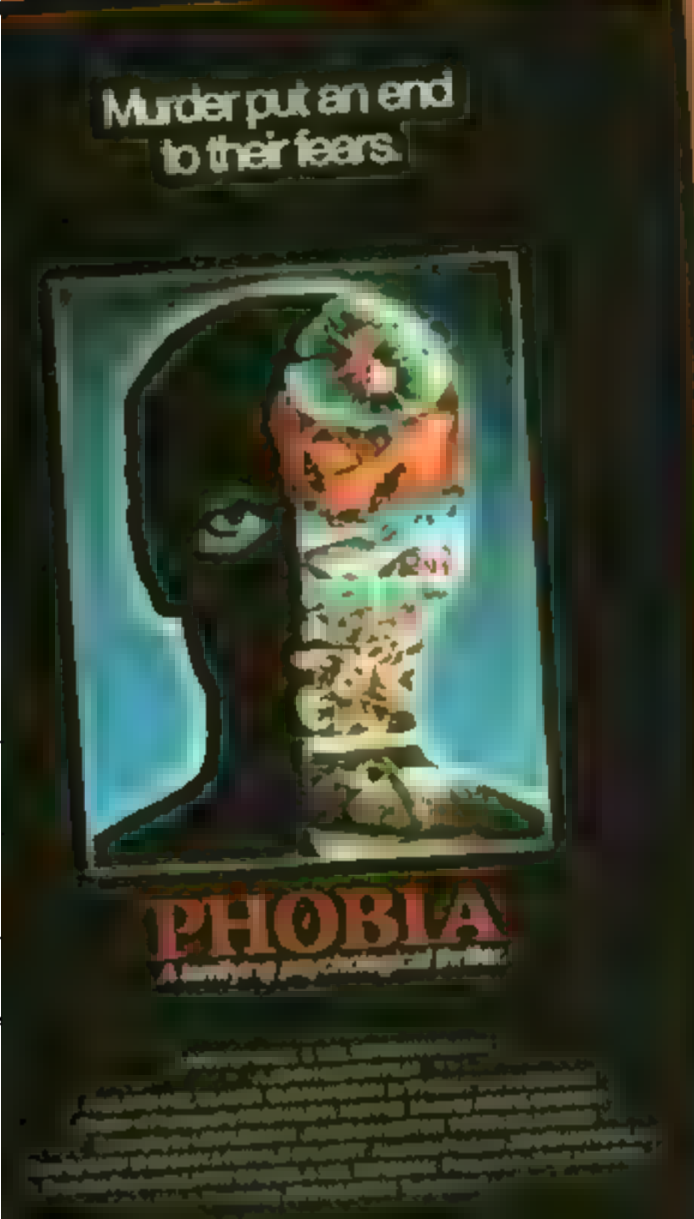
De Palma's *Dressed to Kill*, starring Michael Caine and Nancy Allen, was heavily influenced by *Psycho* and includes a now-familiar shower sequence and a transvestite murderer, although the film's gory and violent razor attacks are far more graphic than Hitchcock could have gotten away with in the 1960s.

Unfortunately for De Palma, *Dressed to Kill* initiated a huge wave of protest on both sides of the Atlantic from women's groups deeply unhappy with the rise in popularity of what they perceived as violent 'women in-peril' films.

De Palma was roundly labelled a misogynist by feminist protesters. The National Organization for Women (NOW) and members of other feminist organizations took part in a silent picket of the film when it was shown on the University of Iowa campus. In May 1982, the National Film Theatre (NFT) in London was similarly picketed by feminists at a showing of the movie during a women's film season. The celebratory banner 'Women Live' was changed to read 'Women Slashed and Murdered at the NFT'.

However, despite the controversy, and proving without a doubt that the subgenre was at the top of its game, the film took almost $32 million at the domestic box office on its release.

Three British video cover for *Dressed to Kill*



Promotional artwork for *Phobia* and *He Knows You're Alone*

SLASHER ALUMNI

Considerably less successful was John Huston's *Phobia*. The talented director – who had made the excellent *Wise Blood* the year before and had directed a number of Hollywood classics – seemed particularly ill at ease with a modern horror thriller. Despite a good premise – patients attend therapy to beat their phobias only to end up dying because of them – it is unbearably dull. More fun than actually watching the film is spotting the slasher movie alumni dotted throughout this Canadian production. Future *Happy Birthday to Me* cast members Lisa Langlois and David Eisner play ill-fated patients, and Marian Waldman, who was such a joy to watch as the boozy sorority mother in *Black Christmas*, puts in a brief appearance as Mrs. Casey in her last film role before her death in 1985.

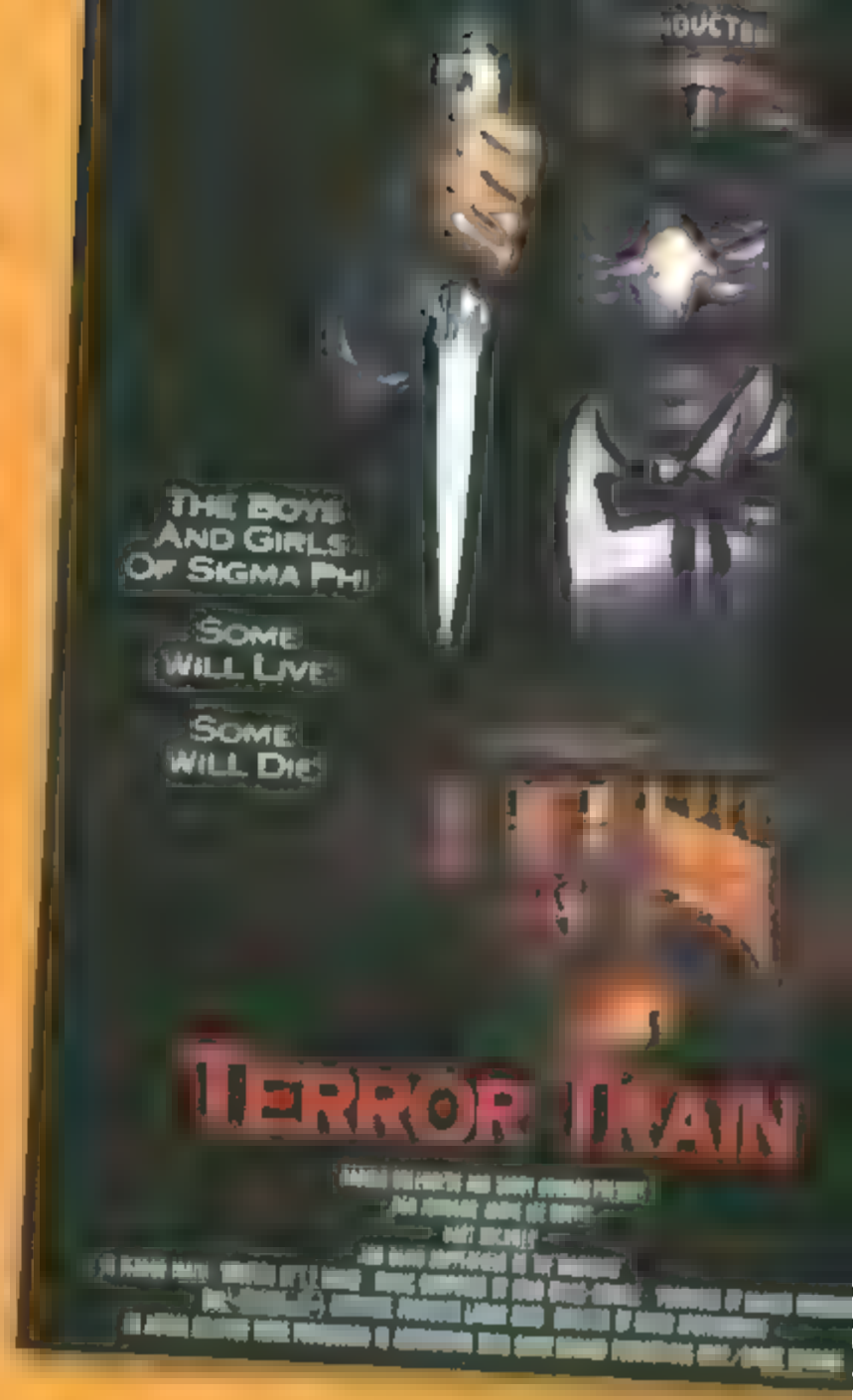
Armand Mastroianni's *He Knows You're Alone*, in which an insane man (Tom Rolfing) targets brides-to-be after being jilted for another man, is a slavish imitator of *Halloween*. It has an identical soundtrack and a similar sounding location (compare Westfield to *Halloween*'s Haddonfield). The Dr. Loomis character is the husband-to-have-been of the first victim and the killer pops up in the shot last like Michael Myers. However, despite Mastroianni flashing many of the false scares, there's still much to enjoy here. As in most early 1980s slasher movies the killer does not actually wear a mask. Perhaps taking a lead from *When A Stranger Calls*, Rolfing grotesquely contorts his face and is a genuinely creepy presence.

Caitlin O'Heaney is a likable Final Girl (see box on page 85). The prologue – where a young woman is murdered while watching a slasher film at the cinema – is perhaps a comment on the differences

between real and reel was so small as to be virtually non-existent and was seemingly the inspiration for a similar scenario in *Scream* (1996). It is also notable for Tom Holland making his film debut as a sexually motivated killer who escapes with his life. The independent feature was shot for a mere $600,000 on Staten Island in New York in the winter of 1979. After the success that Paramount had with *Friday the 13th*, most major studios were keen to cash in on the slasher movie craze and much to the surprise of the filmmakers themselves MGM snapped up the rights for a cool $2 million. The film was a modest hit for the studio, making around $5 million at the domestic box office.

In David Fraser's *Second Attempt* group therapy is also fraught with danger with patients from the group being victims of a sociopathic killer. Produced and made the producer's son Kevin Costa

but seemed intent on making a straight thriller – albeit a sleazy one – with a few slasher movie trappings. It is also enlivened by the presence of the eccentric actor Klaus Kinski who would also feature memorably performance by Christopher Lloyd as a creepy hypnotist named Lonnie Lee Carter returned to Canada and the subgenre with *Terror Train* (see page 98), for review in which a fast-moving graduation bash aboard a train turns deadly when a demented killer comes calling. Despite the presence of Curtis the film was only a minor success taking in $3 million at the domestic box office on a $3 million budget. It was not a disaster but probably less than Jamie Lee Curtis was hoping for and it was certainly less than the two previous Curtis vehicles had made. Despite the slasher film being at the height of its popularity, murmurings began that the subgenre was already burning itself out



American poster art for *Terror Train* and British video artwork for *Schizoid*

'. . . a tale of slasher deaths at the hands of a vengeful spirit . . .'

THE LORE OF THE SLASHER

Scott Mansfield's *Deadly Games* is a perfect example of how the slasher influenced the modern thriller in the early 1980s. A music journalist returns home after the death of her sister, but she slowly realizes that it wasn't an accidental death after a masked killer begins attacking her dead sister's friends. It seems as if slasher movie elements have been inserted into what is an otherwise routine thriller purely because the film's backers presumed audiences wanted them there. Despite this *Deadly Games* appears to have sat on the shelf until 1982.

Ulli Lommel, a German director and one-time collaborator with art house auteur Rainer Werner Fassbinder (whose films include 1981's *Lola* and 1982's *Querelle*), made the unlikely switch from art films – his acclaimed and disturbing *Tenderness of the Wolves* (*Die Zärtlichkeit der Wölfe* 1973) is about a serial killer who targets young boys – to commercially orientated American slasher movies with *The Boogeyman*.

Despite a meagre budget, *The Boogeyman* – a tale of slasher deaths at the hands of a vengeful spirit – was filmed in a very handsome way in Maryland in 1979. From its opening panning shot of a house at night, it is clear that the film's primary inspiration – both visually and thematically – was *Halloween*. To cover all horror bases (and to boost its commercial appeal)

$7 CDN $8.50 CAN

...a Lesah Donaldson hides from the killer in this Mexican lobby card for *Fangs of Horror*.

...American poster art for *New Year's Evil*.

...Lamont makes a bit to use them so that's also a real anger to the one used in *The ...* (1978).

...Eli Roth's terrific tribute to the producer's interesting work and this is the case with *Terror ...* (2007). The meeting of European and North American styles and sensibilities goes the film at other solidify it sometimes stifled it. Despite starting out as a straight example of the sangoma *Ter...* *Fa...* ...an genre veers the supernatural territory when news is unusual at the time although it becomes more conventional ...ter of Agatha ...ng *Hal...* ...ter. It also uses many POV shots although the killer doesn't appear in a physical sense. Rather the ...ver's ...d spirit causes people to kill themselves or ...ase ...ent accidents. The use of a non-corporeal observer may have ...ed the popular *Fa...*

Destination series (in which teenagers are also killed by a similarly unseen Grim Reaper in outrageously inventive ways) in the 2000s.

The Boogeyman reputedly earned $25 million globally on a budget of less than half a million dollars. Unfortunately, it was another slasher movie that ran into the 'video nasty' hysteria that gripped the United Kingdom in the early 1980s.

Released in October in its native Canada (but not making its United States debut until 1982) was William Fruet's *Funeral Home*. Future subgenre star Lesleh Donaldson gets her first and only leading role as a Nancy Drew–like teenager who goes to stay with her weird grandmother who has turned her funeral home into a guest house – only to find the guests are mysteriously vanishing. It became a big cult hit in Mexico, leading Donaldson to rival Jamie Lee Curtis in the scream-queen stakes south of the border.

Significant dates on the calendar were fast being used up as hooks for new slasher films, as were the techniques to make the plots more interesting. Just as *Prom Night* had attempted to mix slasher movie thrills with disco, *New Year's Evil* tried (far less successfully) with New Wave music. In the film, a female rock TV host is stalked by a psycho who calls himself 'Evil' and phones to say that he will kill someone each time midnight strikes in the different time zones across the United States. Despite its novel approach, *New Year's Evil* is dull and practically gore-less. Worst of all, it has

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con M de Muerte
A de Asesino
N de Nausea
I de Implacable
A de Atroz
C de Criminal

Maniac con Joe Spinell · Caroline Munro

1981 – THE SLASHER AT ITS PEAK?

By 1981 the subgenre was showing signs that its audiences were approaching saturation point. Films such as *My Bloody Valentine* all but bombed at the box office despite heavy advertising; other films continued to turn a healthy profit.

[redacted] still relatively cheap to make, and so the [redacted] tsunami continued in the eternal [redacted] for the next *Hallowe'en* or *Friday the 13th*.

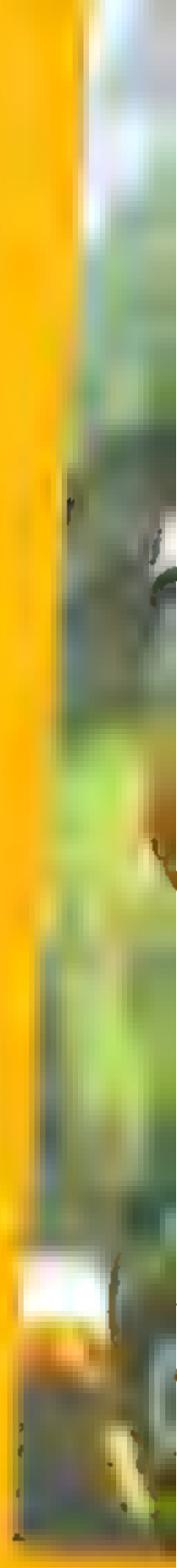
Released on New Year's Day 1981, Jeff Lieberman's *Just Before Dawn* is an arrestingly different take on the campers-in-peril slasher movie, during which a group of youngsters are murdered by an oddball backwoods family. Like Michael Myers in *Hallowe'en*, the killers here – inbred twin brothers (both played by John Hunsaker) – are merely ciphers shambling hunks of meat, giggling killing machines with no rhyme or reason for their crimes. They are jarringly at odds with the teenagers whose only concern is disco dancing around the campfire, skinny-dipping and discussing makeup.

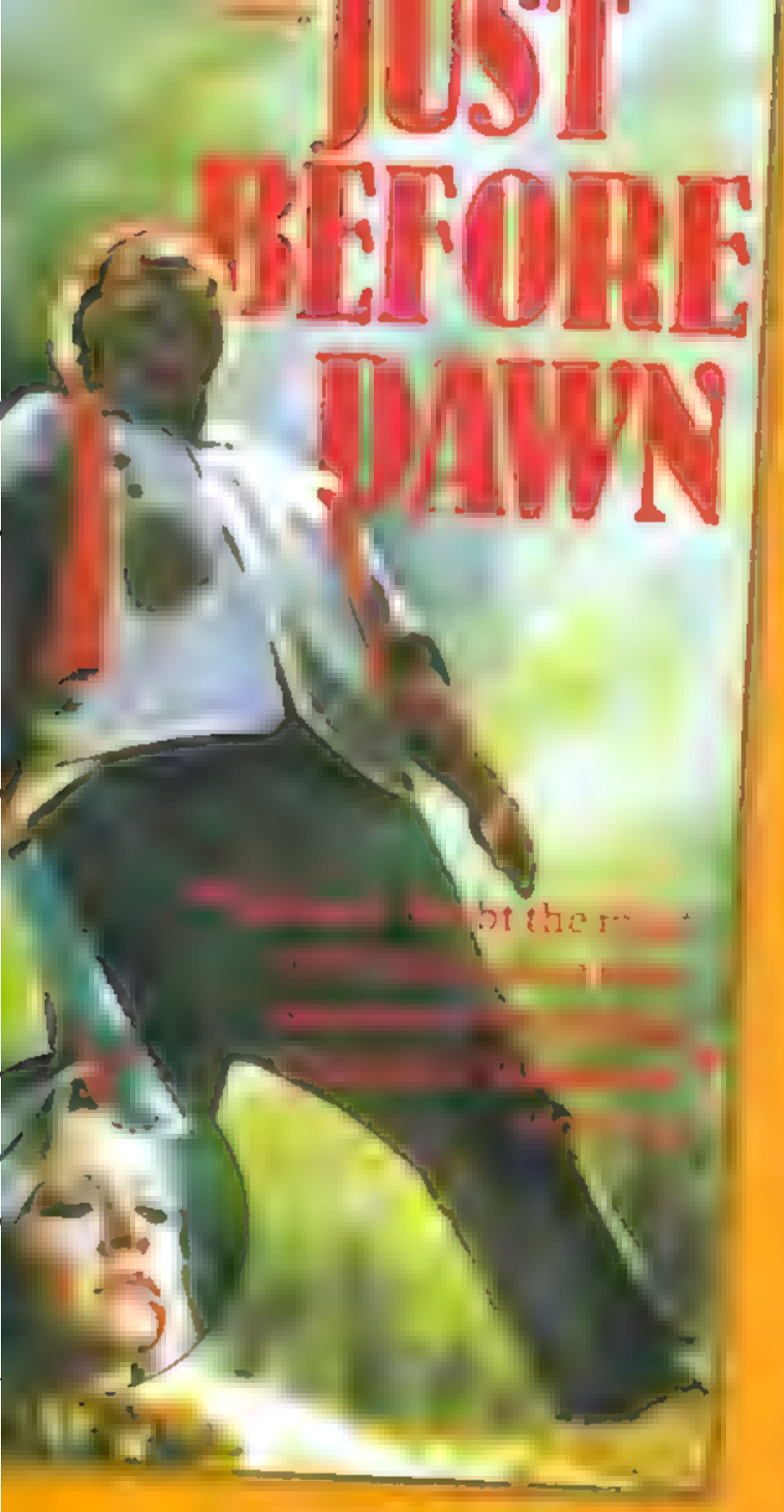
The woods provide both a benign and intimidating backdrop to this potent juxtaposition. Veteran actor George Kennedy is a scream as the ranger, who talks to his plants and horse and dead-pans to the doomed teenagers, 'At least tell me where you're going so when you don't come back, I'll know how to fill out the report.' *Just Before Dawn* is capped with an unforgettable, once-seen-never-forgotten denouement, when Constance (Deborah Benson) – the film's Final Girl – takes the expected 'fight back' scene to a whole new level of shocking absurdity.

'Beware of what you make fun of, you little asshole.'

– Happy, *My Bloody Valentine*

Also released at the beginning of 1981 was *The Outing*, about a group of people stranded in a ghost town who are killed off one by one. Unfortunately, this low-budget





Left British video-cover art for *Just Before Dawn*

bore is a stultifying exercise in tedium. Only of interest is its alternative title *Scream* (a full 15 years before Wes Craven's film) and that it is one of the first slasher movies to have a supernatural angle and one of the only slashers not to have any female victims

One of the best and most fondly remembered subgenre films from this era – and released just in time for lovers everywhere to cuddle just a little bit closer – *My Bloody Valentine* hit the screens in February of 1981 (see page 195 for more).

After the major box-office success of the previous year's *Friday the 13th*, Paramount decided to see if lightning really could strike twice and picked up the Canadian production. Produced by André Link and John Dunning and directed by Hungarian filmmaker George Mihalka, together they fashioned one of the most iconic slashers of the period.

My Bloody Valentine was actually released in a highly edited version after being rejected in its original form by the Motion Picture Association of America threatening it with an X rating and therefore commercial death. In trying to outdo the excesses of *Friday the 13th*, the makers had incensed the censor

Mihalka blamed the backlash against violent movies on the murder of John Lennon in December 1980. He told website Bloody-disgusting.com: 'We were the first up in front of the MPAA. The response was, "Forget it. This is an X." Especially in those days, that would have meant going from a 1,200-theatre release to about 60 porno theatres'

With such a tight editing deadline, the filmmakers had no choice but to bow to the censor's demands – something that may have led to the film's initial less-than-

There's more than one way
to lose your heart.
MY BLOODY VALENTINE

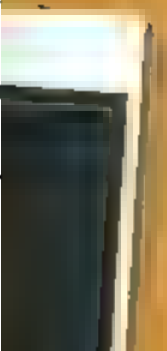
[illegible] a budget of $1.5 to $2.5 million but [illegible] the profits made on *Fr[illegible]*.

MOPPING UP THE BLOOD

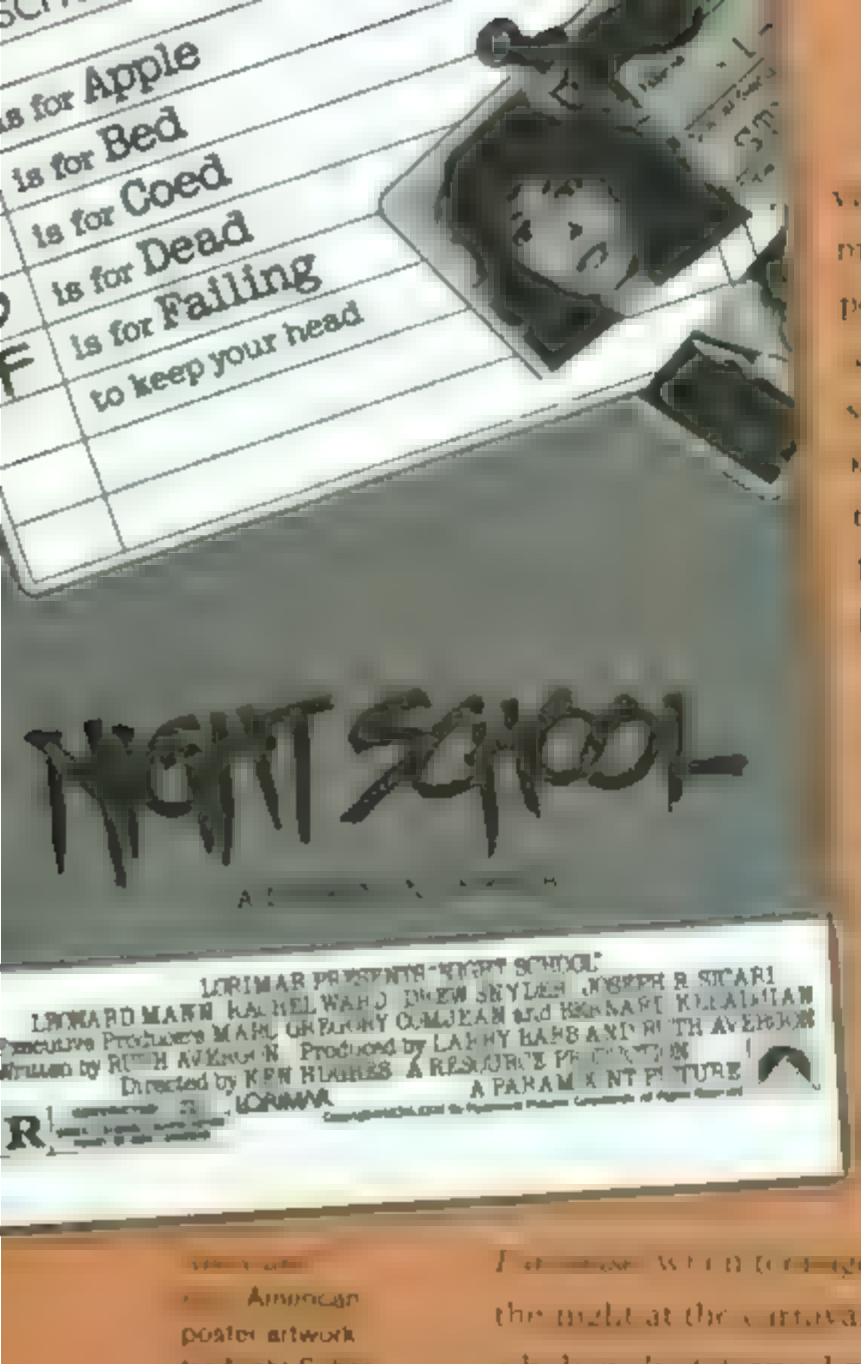
[illegible] Bros picked [illegible] While not quite as meta-inspirited as the previous year's *Don't Answer the Pho[illegible]* doesn't win any prizes for tact. A TV [illegible] murders begins to suspect that her [illegible] right hour may be the culprit. [illegible] film shuttles from one suspens[illegible] bathed in the paste[illegible]stic look – the result of the blistering Miami sunshine, cheap film stock and a bad video transfer – that typified many early 1980s genre flicks. Despite employing Tom Savini – in the hope that he might [illegible] to this mess – most of his graphic special [illegible] ended up on the cutting-room floor. Jennifer Jason Leigh makes a spirited early appearance as a deaf, mute and blind teenager and sister of the lead. [illegible] grandpa – the gruesomely severed head is [illegible] barely made $1 million at [illegible].

[illegible] one of women being decapitated at a Boston college, which was released outside America as *Terror Eyes*. Among early American slasher films, *Nigh[illegible]* *School* seems the most influenced by the Italian *giallo* – from the less-than-riveting police investigation to stealing the killer's crash-helmet disguise [illegible] Andrea Bianchi's *Strip Nude for Your K[illegible]*. Although banned in the United Kingdom as a 'video nasty', it isn't that explicitly

'Blistering Miami sunshine, cheap film stock and a bad video transfer . . .'



Jason Leigh in *Eyes of a Stranger*



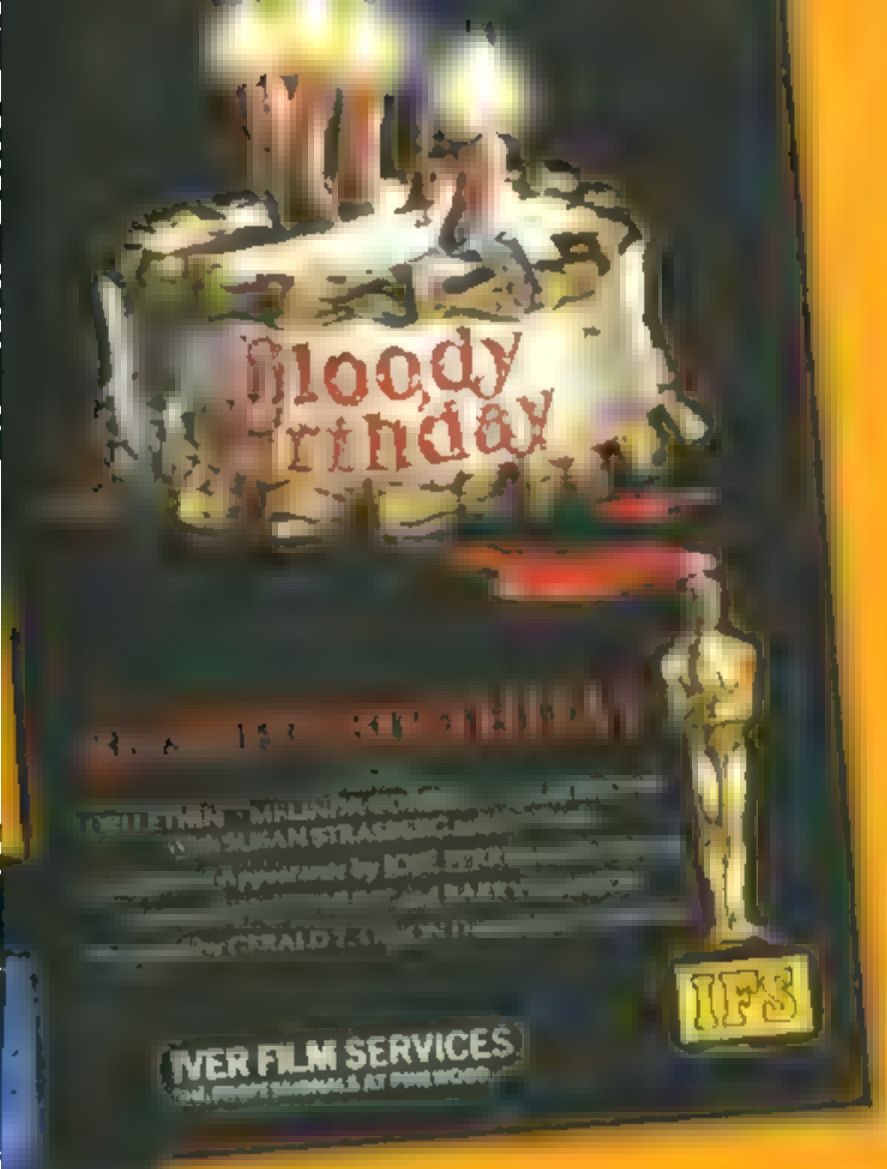
violent. It is the turn of misanthropy and perhaps misogyny despite both the scriptwriter and the director being women that probably caused Britain's censors to backlash at it.

Universal Studios – which will forever be remembered for its creature features of the 1930s – tried to mix its past genres and the slasher movie with Tobe Hooper's *The Funhouse*. Four teenagers decide to spend the night at the carnival, not knowing that a hideously deformed man lurks in the steel-walled secret full review on page [xx]. Despite a reportedly troubled production this teen-in-peril opus still managed $8 million at the box office.

Eaten Alive could struggle against by casting the knife-wielding murderer as a two-dimensional child's book character. Instead, Tobe's bad taste – and all the more terrifying – the little girl digs out hooks and whacks them away through the open mouthed cast. Made in 1980, the film was barely released as *Horror Hotel* in February 1983. As happened with many subsequent hits at the time, it was reissued under a different title – this time to cash in on Tobe's 1982 hit, to become a trash cult classic.

Students had been cast at prominent with varying degrees of success, but now some wouldn't be so lucky. Graduates *Jo* Calder Argue, Lee Cross, Scott Jill the ever-busy Sussmans, the Phillips also appeared. Directors Lasseter Tenney and theatre's Sakata Tashiro and Hal Galili. One teenager gets a nasty shock when a sword to the stomach will be very big deal as a

American poster artwork for *Night School* and promotional Japanese flyer for *The Funhouse*

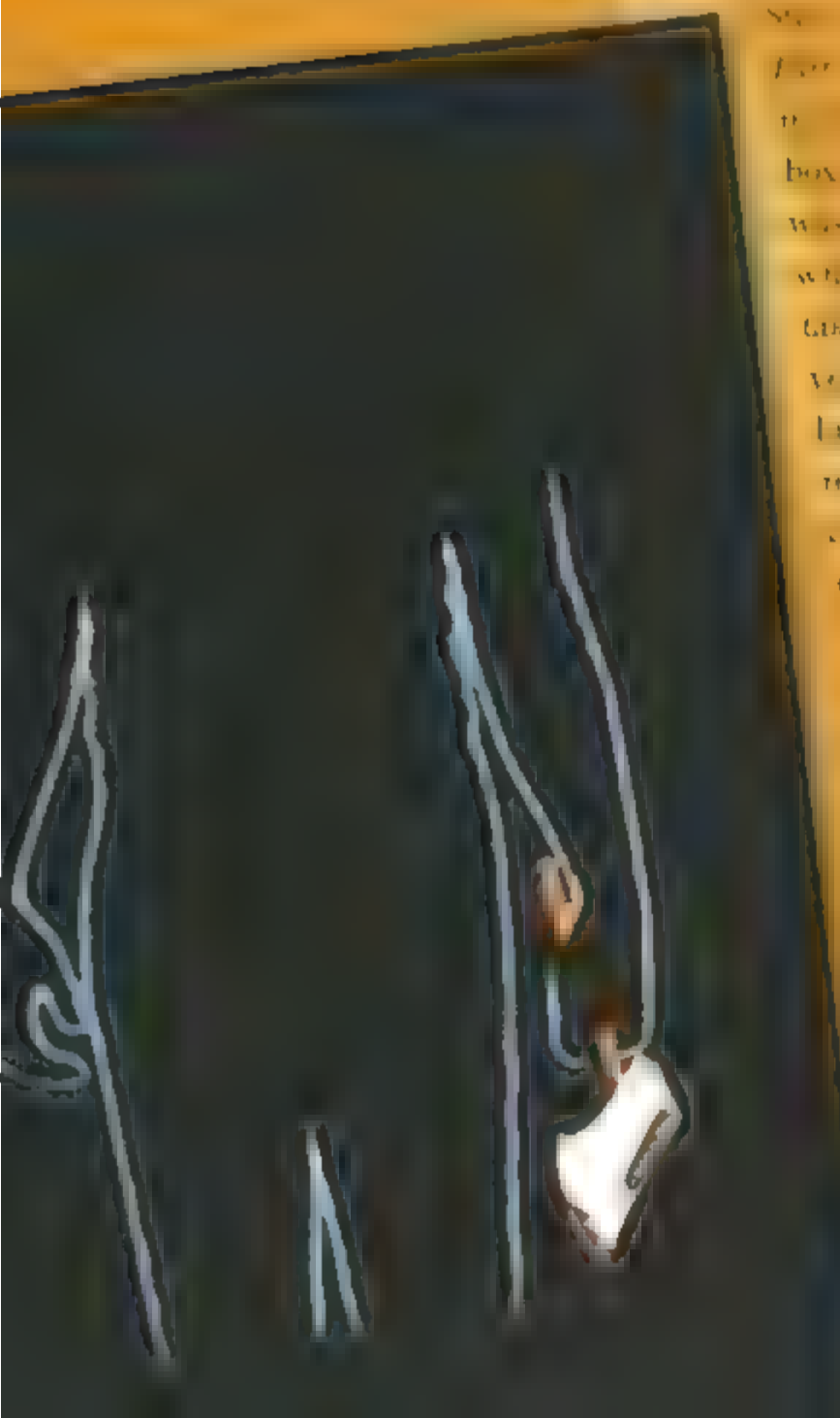


British video artwork for *Bloody Friday* and American poster artwork for *Graduation Day*

ONE GOOD SLASH DESERVES ANOTHER – *FRIDAY THE 13TH PART 2*

the simple but effective artwork used for Friday the 13th Part 2 (1981). An unlucky camper in the same movie.

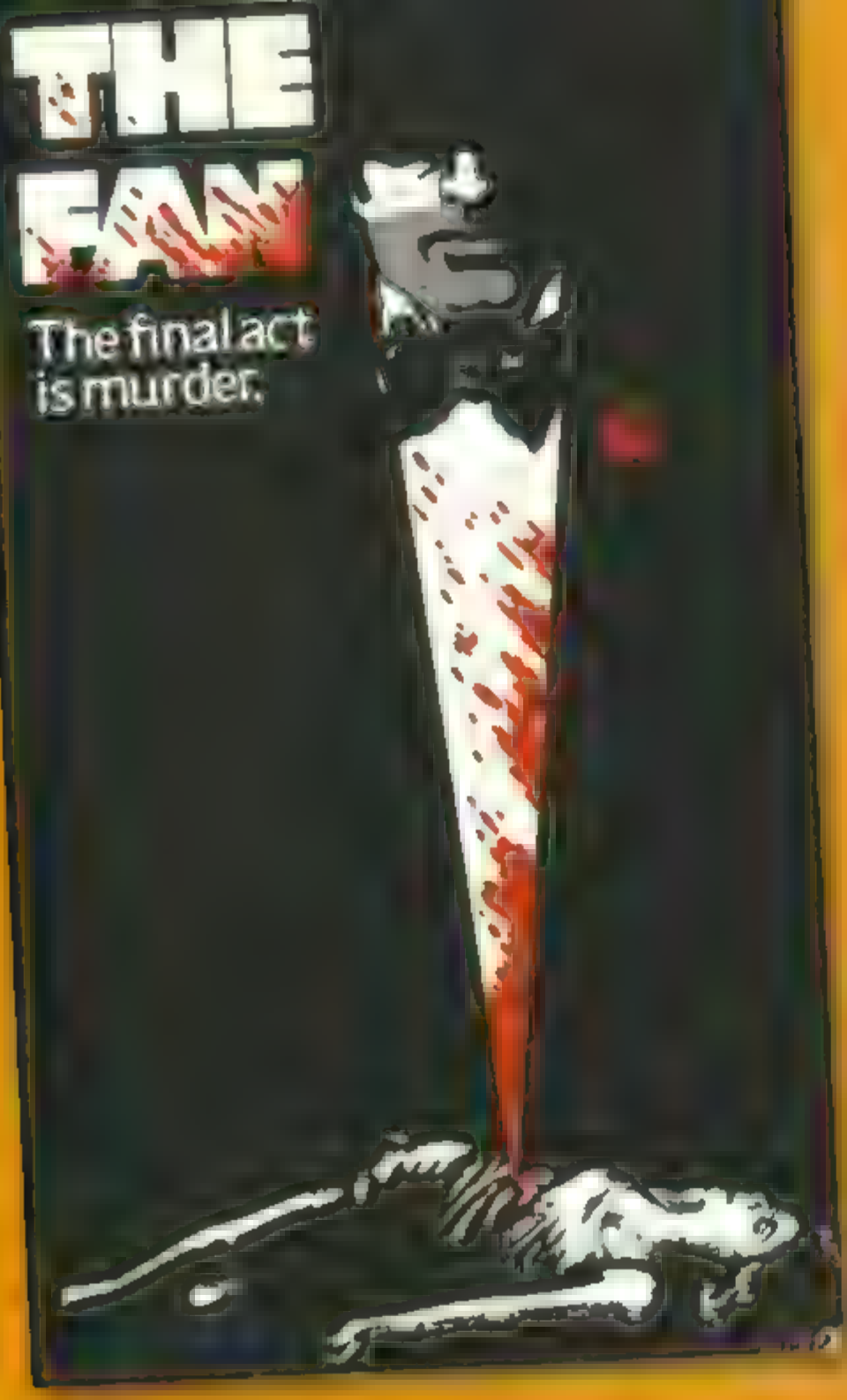
American poster art for The Burning (1981) that's right and a monster of terror from the same movie (below).



THE BURNING

BUILDING ON PREVIOUS SUCCESSES

HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO ME



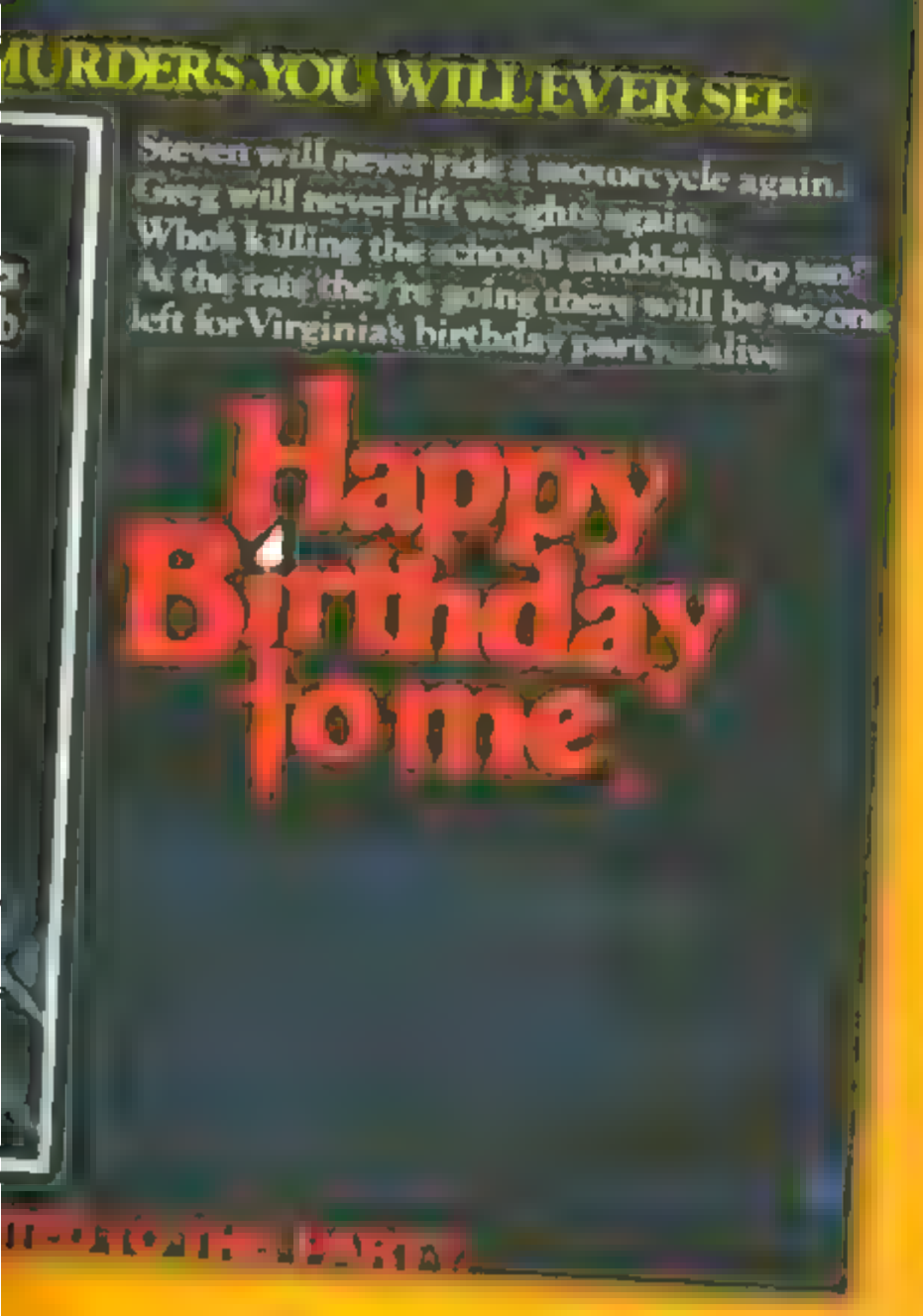
British video art for *The Fan* and the [illegible] artwork for *Harry*

by [illegible] to get a piece of the [illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

[


MURDERS YOU WILL EVER SEE.
Steven will never ride a motorcycle again.
Greg will never lift weights again.
Who's killing the school's snobbish top set?
At the rate they're going there will be no one
left for Virginia's birthday party... alive.
Happy Birthday to me

HELL NIGHT AND MORE

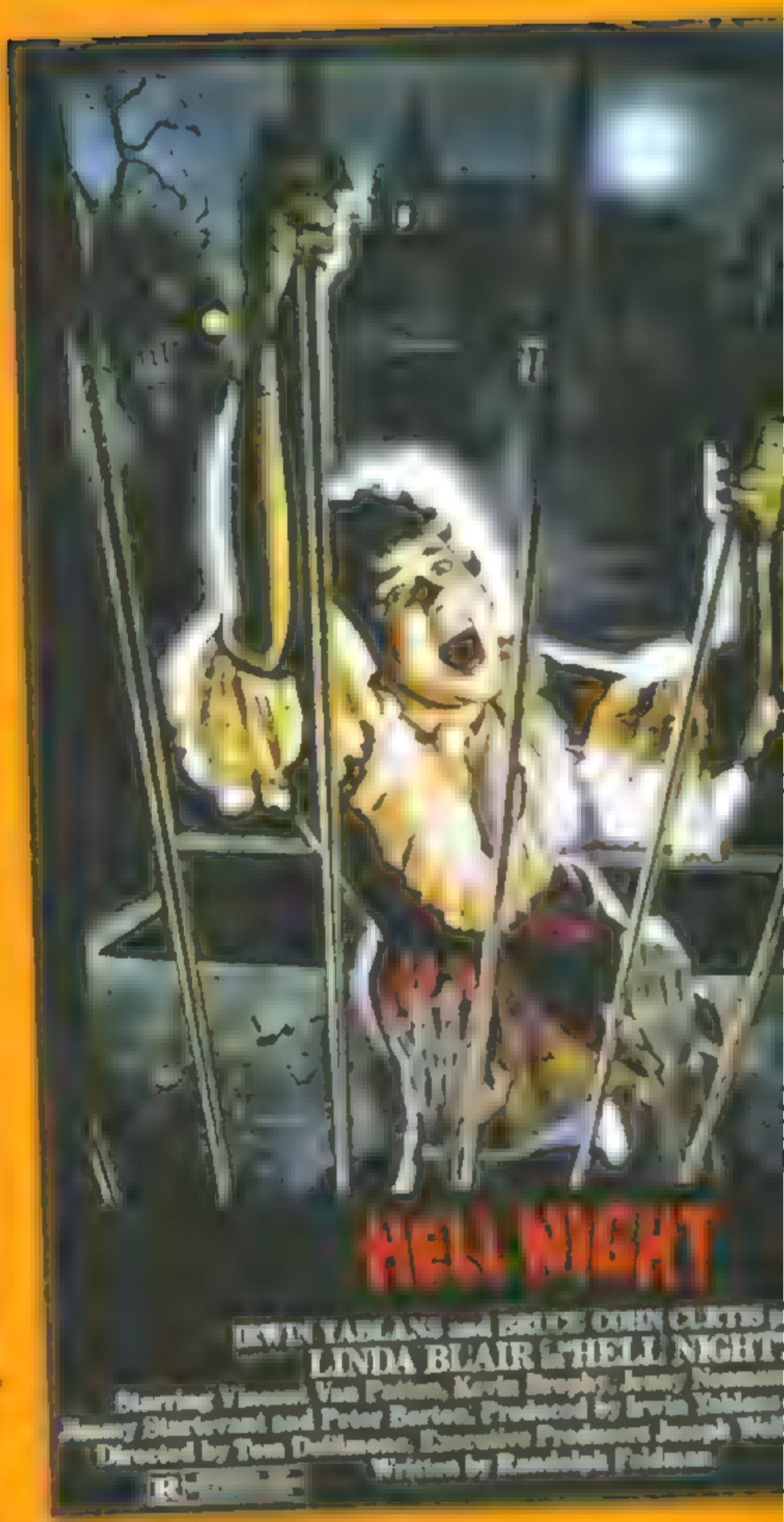
...Bet she dies over for Final Exam

I must have found notoriety as the world's most famous possessed tendon for *Evil Dead* star Bruce Campbell, but I've gone on to contemplate my career since 1987 when she took the lead in the cult classic *Evil Dead II*. Now I'm in my late thirties and I've gone on to appear in a supposedly haunted mansion with real results (see a full review on page [illegible]).

Looking to get more mileage out of the slasher form, *Hell Night* executive producer Irwin Yablans hoped lightning would strike twice. Director Tom DeSimone was well aware that a MEVA had come down hard on the film's contemporaries, so he determined to be responsible. However, as the nervous filmmakers were becoming aware that as the producers cut the film more before the censors had to make do [illegible] getting their hands on it. Costing a meagre $1.5 million, *Hell Night* was a great success at the box office when it opened on August 19th with takings of $4.3 million.

Hell Night mixed murder ex-Bond girl Barbara Bach and Dan Shor's music. Even more strange is the little scene at the [illegible] when

HALLOWEEN II – MORE OF THE NIGHT HE CAME HOME



HALLOWEEN II
ALL NEW
From The People Who Brought You
"HALLOWEEN"...
More Of The Night
He Came Home.
MOUSTAPHA AKKAD PRESENTS A
DINO DE LAURENTIIS COMP. FILM
JAMIE LEE CURTIS
DONALD PLEASENCE
"HALLOWEEN II"
A JOHN CARPENTER/DEBRA HILL PRODUCTION
JOHN CARPENTER AND DEBRA HILL
RICK ROSENTHAL
DEBRA HILL JOHN CARPENTER
BARRY BERNARDI
DEAN CUNDEY

Japanese promotional artwork for Halloween II

For many, myself included, Halloween is the movie that defined the horror genre. Released in 1978, it was the first film to feature a masked killer who stalked and murdered his victims with a knife. Before Halloween, there were a few films that had featured a killer who stalked his victims with a knife, but none of them had the same impact as Halloween. Halloween was the first film to feature a killer who stalked his victims with a knife, but none of them had the same impact as Halloween.

Halloween was the first film to feature a killer who stalked his victims with a knife, but none of them had the same impact as Halloween. Halloween was the first film to feature a killer who stalked his victims with a knife, but none of them had the same impact as Halloween. Halloween was the first film to feature a killer who stalked his victims with a knife, but none of them had the same impact as Halloween.

ON THE PROWL

[illegible] *The Mummy* [illegible] was distributed [illegible] double-bill [illegible] Stuart Gilmore [illegible] *Invisible Man* [illegible]

Everyone has nightmares
about the ugliest way to die
DON'T GO IN
THE WOODS
alone!
R
NICK McCLELLAND
JAMES P. HAYDEN · KEN CARTER & TOM DRUITT
VIDEO RELEASING ORGANIZATION

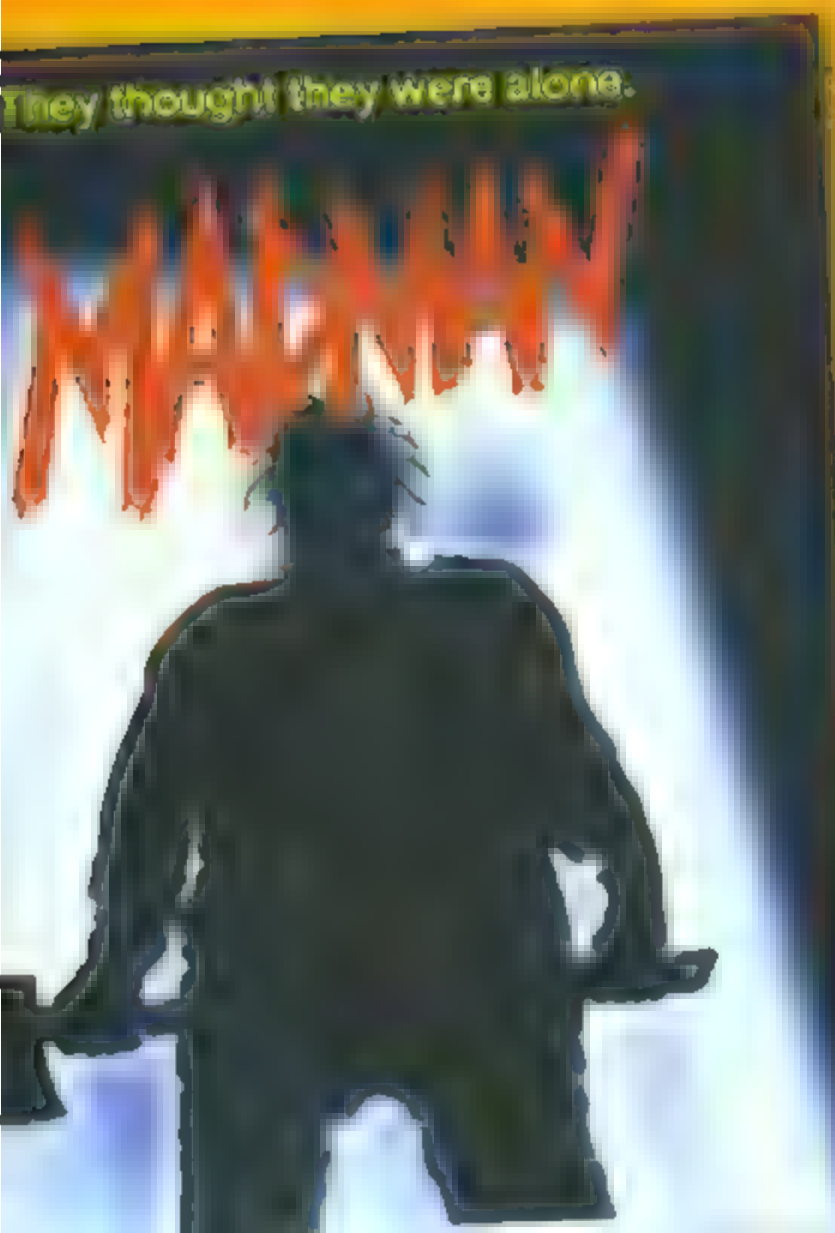
ISBN 0-9670199-4-7

3 Days of the Scarecrow

A terrifying suspense story

1982 – CAMP AND CREEPY

The slasher movie peaked by 1982 and began its slow descent towards straight-to-video hell. However, there was still blood to be rung from the subgenre yet, as the supernatural began to feature more heavily and a certain psycho put on his iconic hockey mask for the first time.



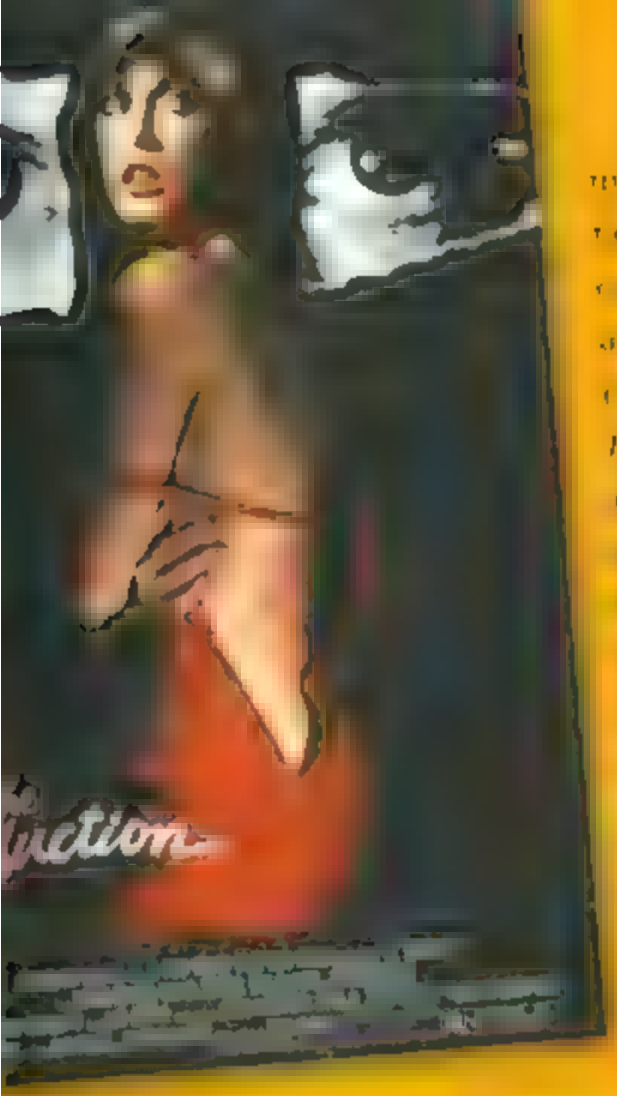
Below American poster artwork for *Madman*

One of the first slasher movies released in 1982 was Joe Giannone's *Madman*. Alternatively cheap and cheerful, and sometimes even a little creepy, it was a late arrival in the already crowded summer-camp-slaughter cycle. A big-mouthed teenager rouses a local legend – the psychotic, hulking farmer Madman [redacted] proceeds to hack up counsellors one by one. Like *The Burning*, *Madman* was based on the urban Cropsy Maniac legend from New York State. In fact although the film got the go-ahead in August 1980 news of *The Burning* put the production on hold as they assessed if the world could handle two Cropsys. After the plot was reworked, *Madman* was shot on Long Island in late 1980. Despite some of the cheesiest performances ever committed to celluloid, it manages some fairly suspenseful sequences, particularly when one of the counsellors chooses to hide inside a fridge. *Madman* made the top 10 *Variety* list the week of its New York opening and did especially well on video

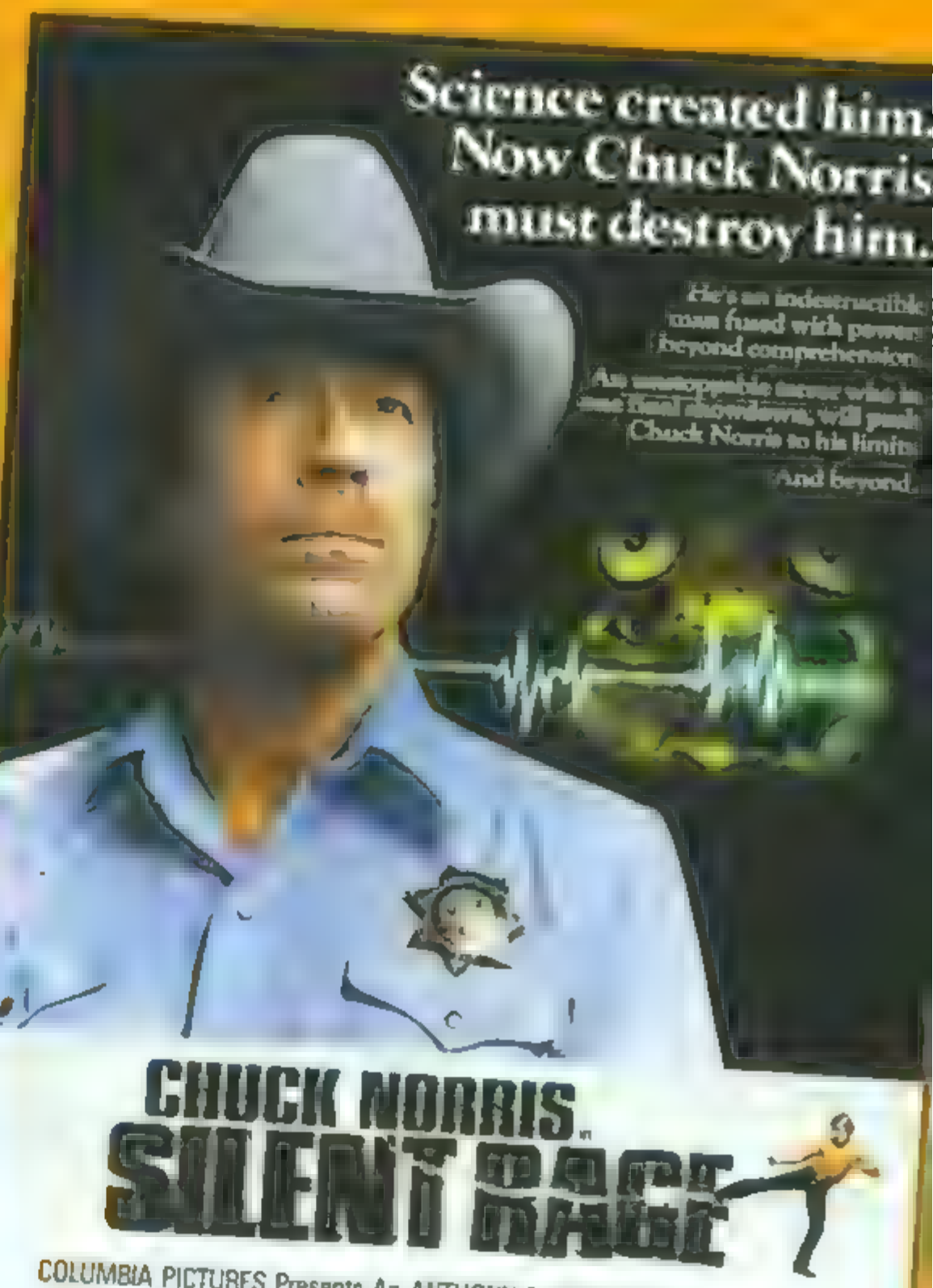
'The slasher . . . began its slow descent towards video hell.'

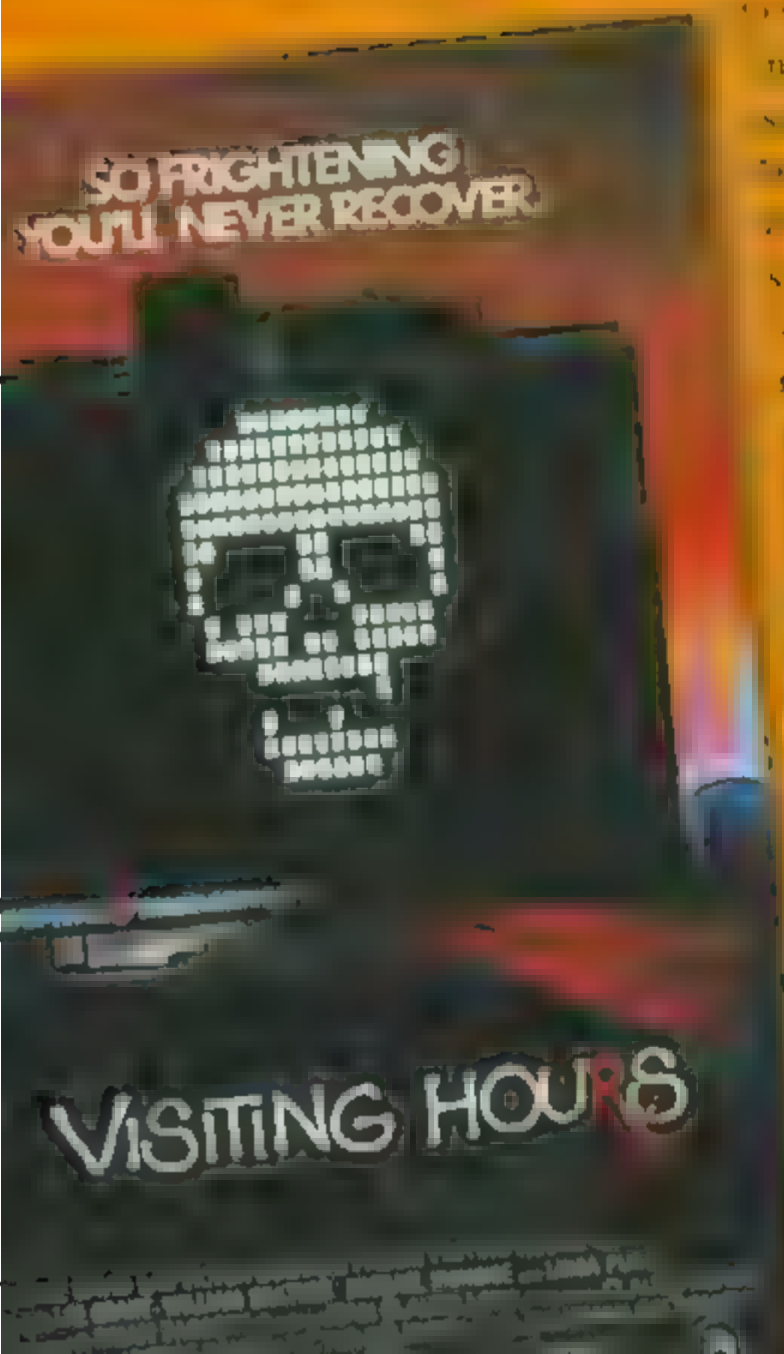
[redacted]

The Seduction was written and directed by David Schmoeller. Unfortunately, this dire attempt to add an erotic edge to the slasher showed little of the promise he hinted at in his earlier and far superior film *Tourist Trap*. The film's producers insisted on casting Morgan Fairchild, and she spends



American poster artwork for *Eve of Destruction* and *Silent Rage*




SO FRIGHTENING
YOU'LL NEVER RECOVER
VISITING HOURS

"The Villain
Makes
Coed Stew."
PRANKS

American poster for Honeymoon Horror and another crispy

[illegible] rentals alone on the then-[illegible]geting medium.

Despite budgets getting smaller and stories [illegible]r, the slasher movie still showed [illegible]ed surprise. *Alone in the Dark* has not [illegible]e but several mental patients escape[illegible]

humorous without tipping into farce. In a very nice touch the escapees find that the outside world is even more dysfunctional than the asylum as they stumble across a riot during a power cut. The most infamous image from the film is that of a knife shooting up through a mattress between the legs of a babysitter and although the phallic implications there are clear it is fair to say that the majority of the violence is committed by men [illegible] other men.

Directed by Jack Sholder – the editor [illegible] – *Alone in the Dark* was budgeted to cost around $[illegible] million. Despite Tom Savini providing one of the film's shock effects it [illegible] proved to

A Japanese promotional flyer for *Alone in the Dark*

[illegible] *Friday* [illegible] should be [illegible]

FRANCHISES – *FRIDAY THE 13TH PART 3*

The most successful slasher film of 1982 *Friday the 13th Part 2* grossed a massive $21 million dollars at the US box office. In the first three weeks of release the film grossed something

'Give me something to scream about.'

– Chili, *Friday the 13th Part 3*

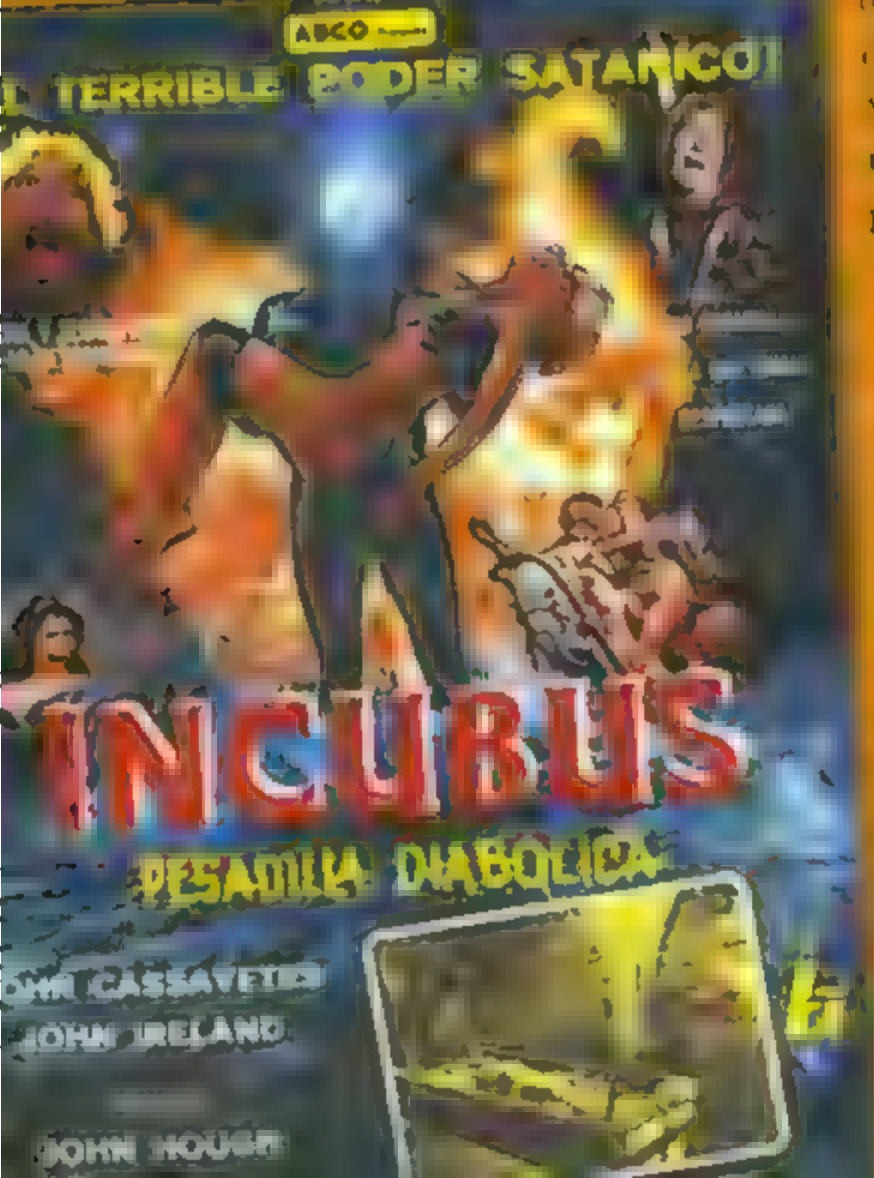
[illegible] weekend [illegible] box office champ [illegible] Director Steve Miner returned [illegible] and the plot was more [illegible] the sequel [illegible] added the gimmick of [illegible] Dana Kimmell led the returning [illegible] across which [illegible] previous victims [illegible] Vorhees [illegible] for [illegible] very successful [illegible] most [illegible] a great [illegible] box office success.

The film was topped off by [illegible] surprise [illegible] which [illegible] given away by the [illegible] attacked by Mrs Vorhees [illegible] Jason [illegible] the first film. An extremely [illegible] which Jason whacks off Chris's head [illegible] a machete was seen as [illegible] victims [illegible] very entertaining [illegible] a perfect example [illegible] by 1982 the [illegible] asking [illegible] Jason [illegible] was [illegible]

A DEMON TOO FAR

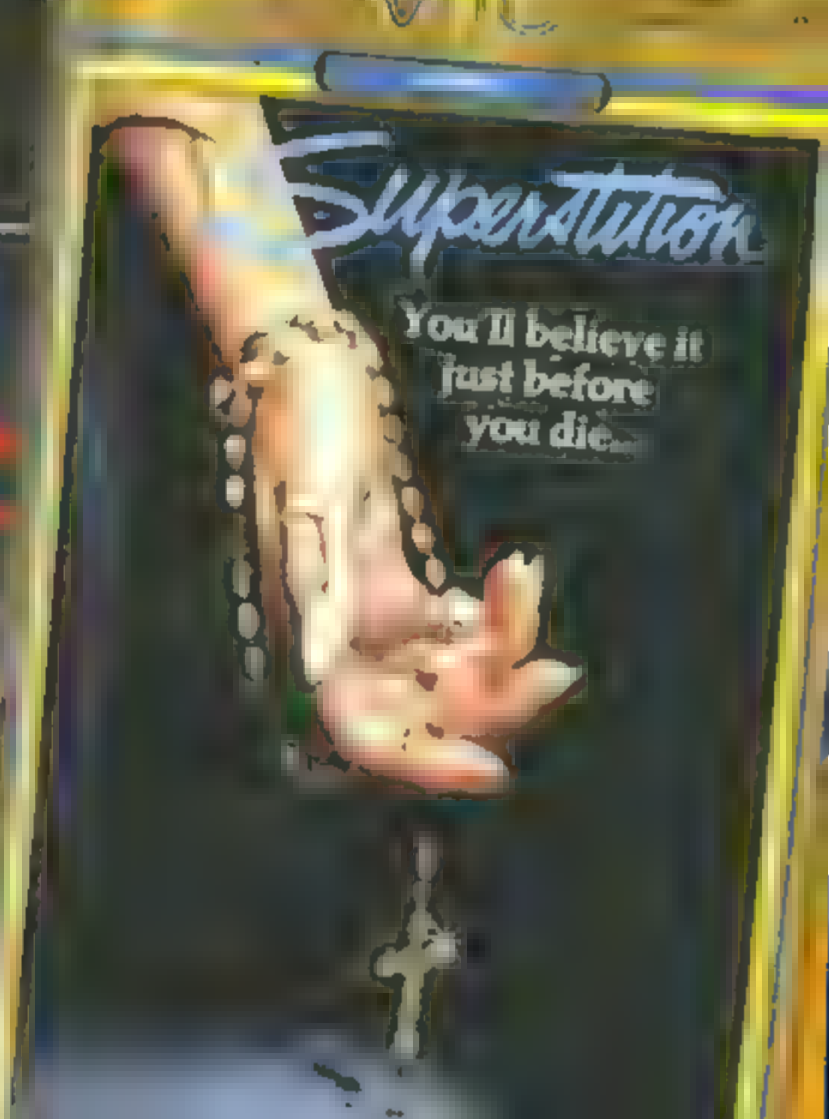
Dark Kismet hands out the perks of being a Free Gen when she's menaced by Jason Voorhees in *Friday the 13th Part 3*

Mexican poster artwork for the Spanish release of the Boris Karloff film



¡Los que murieron
fueron más afortunad

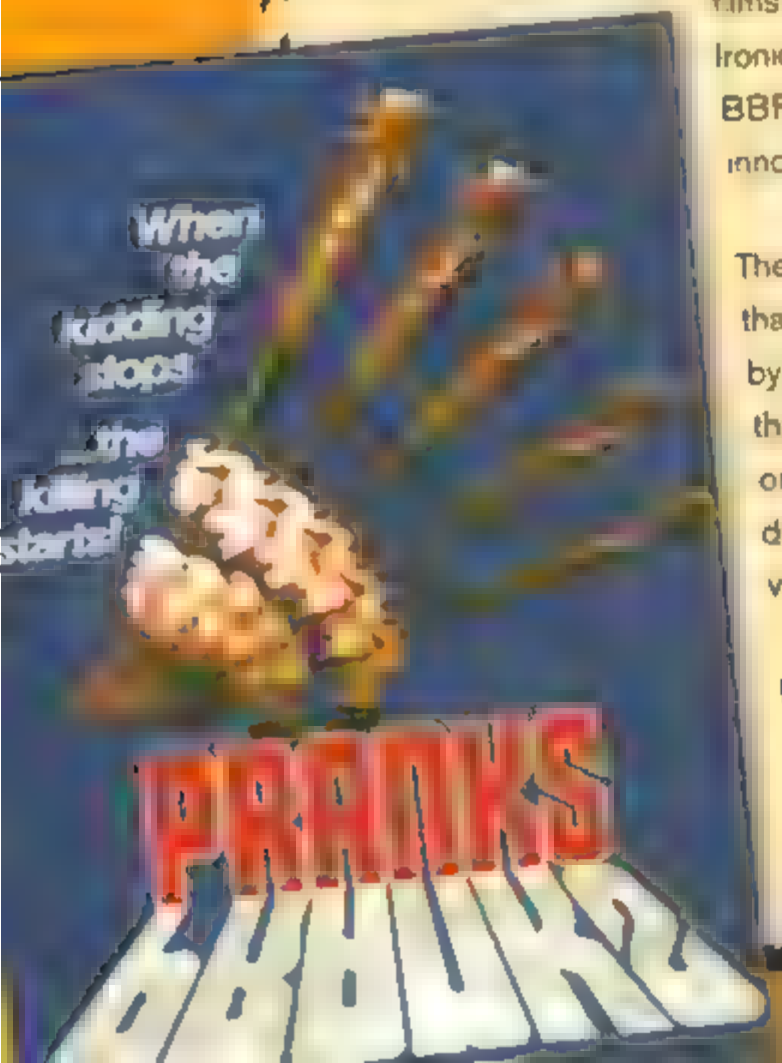
Mexican lobby card
for Superstition (US)
the British video
artwork for the same
film (UK)



THE RISE AND FALL OF THE 'NASTIES'

'Video nasty' was the British tabloid term invented in the early 1980s for the type of violent horror and exploitation movies especially popular at the time. A sizable number were slashers, including *The Burning*, *Bloody Moon* (see Mexican artwork at right), *Don't Go in the House* and *Pranks* (see British video artwork below). In the early 1980s, the British video market was flooded with hundreds of previously unseen, unedited and uncensored films, due to a loophole in the law. Public hysteria, whipped up by sensational newspaper headlines and campaigning by politicians and religious groups, created what can only be described as a witch hunt on horror movies, which were blamed for everything from juvenile delinquency to the collapse of society itself.

The infamous Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) list of films liable for prosecution under the Obscene Publications Act first appeared in June 1983. Shelves were cleared in video stores across Britain by zealous police forces, and 39 films were effectively banned as a result of prosecution under the law. Ironically, a number of films that had been given a cinema certificate by the BBFC were also targeted by this new moral fervour. Slashers as relatively innocuous as *The Funhouse* also found themselves under scrutiny.



The Video Recordings Act of 1984 was hurriedly assembled, ensuring that all videos released in Britain would be previewed and censored by the BBFC. The legacy of the hysteria of the previous years meant that many slashers were subsequently heavily cut or had their releases on video delayed, some, such as the *Friday the 13th* franchise, were delayed by several years, with a cut version of *Part 3* only appearing on video in the United Kingdom in 1987.

In recent years, the more relaxed attitude towards film censorship in Britain has meant that many former 'video nasty' slashers have received uncut releases to DVD. Indeed, with lip-smacking irony, most wear their badge of former notoriety with honour to sell themselves to fresh and unwitting blood-thirsty audiences.

Back hand
American video
artwork for
Satan's Blade

MOCUL

SATANS BLADE

...s a low budget
...Despite good reviews
...was barely released. Even less
...far from complete, barely two
...later when it was picked up and released
...United States.

...was also released
...years later
...example, there is a movie
...which is an H.P. Lovecraft
...adaptation, but also
...and is supposed
...sequel, but it was shot on the set
...for two years before its release.
...
...

Below American poster artwork for *Girls Nite Out*

Far right American poster artwork for *The Slumber Party Massacre*

with knives as his fingers (anticipating Freddy Krueger once again). It has a strongly misogynistic edge, featuring insults such as 'Slut! Bitch! Whore!' which are hissed as the coeds are killed. It doesn't have a Final Girl, in contrast to other slashers of the time. However, the film's closing moments resonate with a scene of genuine creepiness that is missing from the rest of the film.

Hoping to score a [illegible] of the box office that *Halloween II* had scared up the previous year, the execrable *Trick or Treats* demonstrated just how quickly the quality of the subgenre was slipping. This film also showed that filmmakers were still ripping off Carpenter's movie a good four years after its original release – in this case, the babysitter is stalked by someone who has escaped from an asylum.

FEMINIST SLASHER?

The Slumber Party Massacre was atypical [illegible] pastiche of the slasher. The viewer sees a group of high school girls blissfully unaware that a psycho with a portable power drill has escaped from an asylum and is about to return to town to torment them. Perhaps most interestingly, it was directed by a woman (Amy Holden Jones) and the script was written by a bisexual feminist activist (Rita Mae Brown).

Because the film was in production at the very height of protests about violence against women in cinema, it is tempting to see it as a kind of crypto-feminist slasher flick. Certainly the implications are clear when we see the symbolic emasculation of the killer, when a girl fights back and manages to snap his intentionally phallic drill bit in half, but women fighting back in horror flicks was certainly nothing new – and, if anything, post-*Halloween*, it was almost de rigueur.

BIG TROUBLE

[redacted] for *The Last Horror* [redacted] lobby card for *Blood Song* (right)

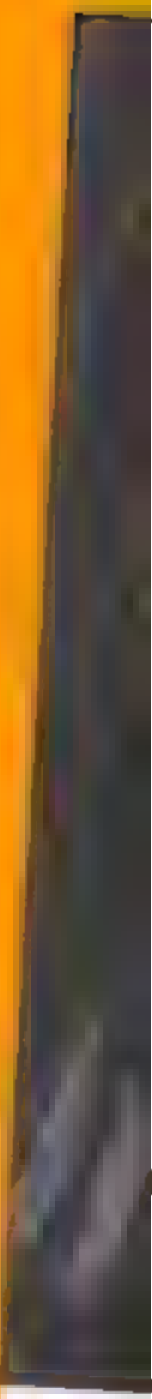
carefully on top. A change at the top of AVCO Embassy ensured that it was barely released to theatres.

A PLACE FOR GIRLS TO GO

Perhaps one of the strangest pieces of casting in slasher movie history was singer and former 1950s teen idol Frankie Avalon as a psychotic killer in *Blood Song*. Only four years previously he had serenaded high school students in *Grease* – but now he had graduated to butchering them with a hatchet. Stretching credulity even further, Avalon is a flute-playing escapee from an asylum, who appears to have developed a psychic link with a crippled teenage girl (Donna Wilkes) after a blood transfusion. In a trance, she witnesses his killing sprees in what is perhaps one of the most bizarre of all slashers. It ends with Avalon chewing scenery with gusto while chasing Wilkes in a forklift around a warehouse, screaming 'I really like you, Marion!'

English director David Winters hoped to recreate the financial success of William Lustig's *Maniac* when he cast the film's star in *The Last Horror Film*. Joe Spinell – so sweatily effective in his earlier role – plays the number-one fan of a scream queen (Caroline Munro), whose entourage is being gorily offed by a mysterious killer. Whereas *Maniac* was unremittingly grim, *The Last Horror Film* is pure camp. Despite its self-reflective nature, the film failed to find an audience on large screen in theatres but did eventually find one on video.

Rounding out 1982, *Too Scared to Scream* saw murders at an upscale apartment complex, while the bizarre Wisconsin filmed *Blood Beat* seemed to have a seven-foot-tall samurai conjured up by female masturbation. Made in 1978, the loopy axe-murder opus *Dark Sanity* got a belated release, and the mildly diverting *Death Valley* distinguished itself by having a young boy dodging the attentions of a psychotic killer.



AQUELLA
MUSICA
ERA PRELUDIO
DE MUERTE.
¡DE UN SICOPATA
ASESINO!

ALLSTATE Film Company presenta a:

NKIE AVALON DONNA WILKES DANE CLARK

en

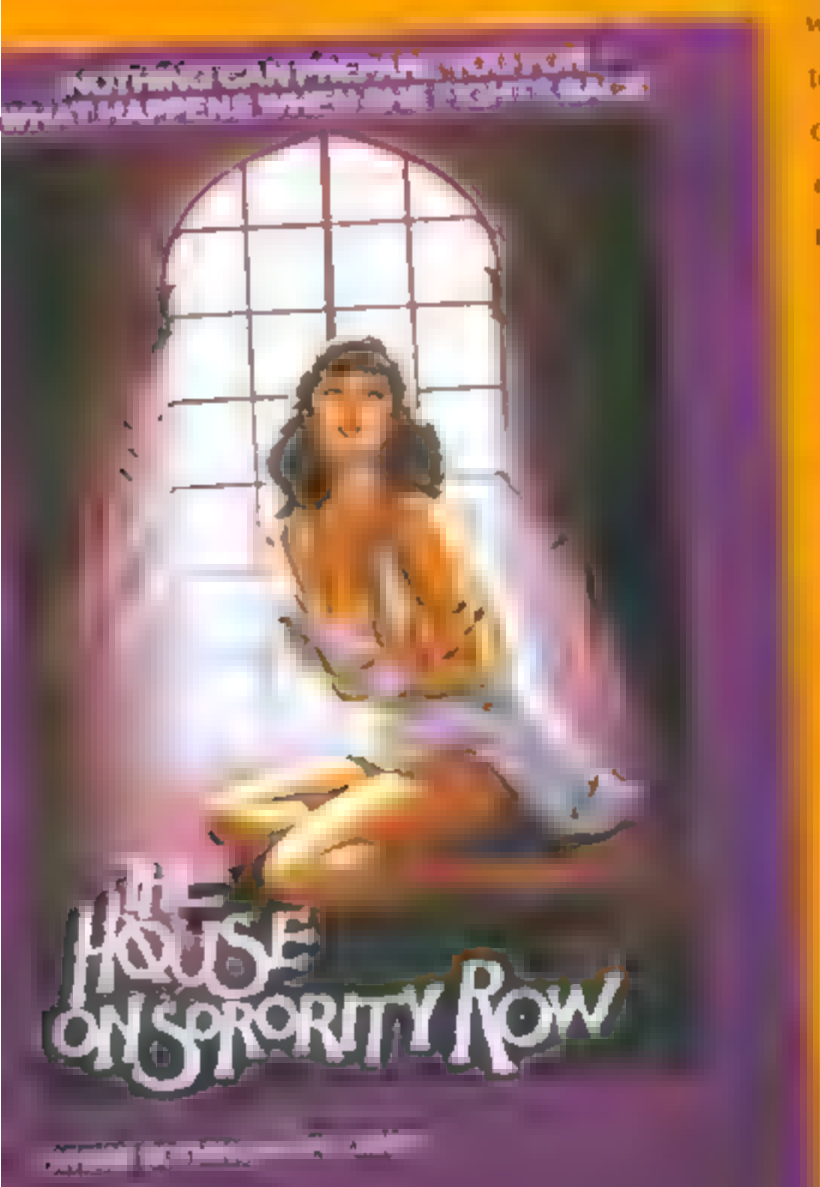
LODIA SINIESTRA

(Blood Song)

or ALAN J. LEVI Productores: FRANK AVIANCA y LEE SHROUT en COLOR
AMES FARGO, FRANK AVIANCA y LENNY MONTANA Música: MONTY TURNER

1983 – A COUPLE OF TWISTS

By 1983 the Golden Age of the slasher movie was fast coming to a close. What had been cutting-edge terror only a few years previously was now looking decidedly old hat.



Below and far right American poster artwork for *The House on Sorority Row* and British video artwork for *Double Exposure (right)*

Even the emerging franchises took the year off, with no *Friday the 13th* movie and the *Halloween* series having dumped the [illegible] Myers Meets Cyrus *Halloween III: Season of the Witch* in the previous year. Still, the low budgets and potentially high profits meant that there were still those willing to risk new enterprises or simply foolhardy enough to dust off those half-remembered productions that were sitting on the shelf.

A FEW NEW TRICKS IN THE OLD BAG YET

Even by this late stage there were still some tricks left to play. In early 1983, one of the best slasher movies of the period was released. Mark Rosman managed to make an exciting, suspenseful and stylish film with *The House on Sorority Row*. To give the film a twist, Rosman wanted to kill off his Final Girl and shot an ending where she was found floating face down in a swimming pool. However, the film's distributor had other ideas and insisted on a more ambiguous close (see review on page 196). Despite flawed poster artwork that made it look like a soft-core porn movie, *The House on Sorority Row* bucked the trend and made a tidy profit of over $10 million at the domestic box office.

'It is a heady concoction of incest and homophobia.'

Double Exposure, on the other hand, was something of an ego trip for lead actor and producer Michael Callan. He plays a middle-aged photographer who is seemingly irresistible to women. The only problem is that he dreams he is killing his models – and when he wakes they really are dead. Unusually complex and

DOUBLE EXPOSURE
Starring
MICHAEL CALLAN,
JOANNA PETTET,
JAMES STACY
SMILE AND SAY "DIE!"

British video artwork

MIXING GENRES

SEPULCROS
LA ULTIMA
LLAMADA

Below British video artwork for *The Final Terror*

made all his own. The film's tag line is even designed to inflame: 'Forget what's legal do what's right'. Bronson spends as much time battling liberals as he does the naked killer (Gene Davis), whose underpants stay on in the TV version. The film also recalls the real-life murders of Richard Speck when Davis, clutching a knife invades the apartment of four student nurses. The movie was a modest success at the box office.

The Final Terror juxtaposes urban teenagers with a primal terror – actually an insane woman who has become feral. She is shown camouflaged by her surroundings, covered in moss and leaves. Curiously muted but similar to many of the backwoods slashers from this time, the film features happy campers roasting marshmallows and telling creepy stories around the campfire. If it all seemed curiously dated by 1983, that was because it was made in 1981 – the height of the slasher craze. It eventually saw the light of day due to the subsequent popularity of its young cast. Daryl Hannah was on the verge of the big time with *Splash* (1984) and Rachel Ward – already a slasher movie veteran of *Night School* – was starring in the popular TV adaptation of *The Thorn Birds*. During the film's theatrical release, at least one cinema in Charlotte, North Carolina joined forces with a camping store to put a themed display in the lobby. It is not known whether the sales of camping goods spiked or, indeed, helped *The Final Terror* bring in cinema goers.

PSYCHO II

Making a sequel to Hitchcock's *Psycho* (see page 29) was ambitious, but near the end of the 1980s slasher movie boom, that is

PSYCHO II

American poster artwork for *Psycho* and British video art for *Psycho*

'I do have affection for Norman as a person. . . . He is, at heart, a benevolent soul, with a dark side.'

– Anthony Perkins on Norman Bates

[illegible] of Robert Bloch's novel [illegible] *Psycho* [illegible] of his previous [illegible] *Psycho* [illegible] of his performances better than it has any [illegible] to. Not surprisingly, the film met with mixed reviews but scared up an impressive $34 725 000 at the domestic box office, a lot more than most studio movies of the time. It was subsequently followed by the Perkins-helmed *Psycho III* (1986) and *Psycho IV: The Beginning* (1990).

Psycho had been in preproduction as far back as 1980 but did not get a US release until September 1983. A teenager Mary Beth McDonough from TV's *Awesome* [illegible] *The Waltons* [illegible] to [illegible] with her father's [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]

GO TO TEXAS
MASSACRE!

YOUR
BEFORE
YOU ARE BURIED...
BEFORE
YOU ARE COVERED
WITH THE LAST
SHOVELFUL OF DIRT...

BE SURE YOU ARE
REALLY DEAD!

MORTUARY

WHERE NOBODY RESTS IN PEACE

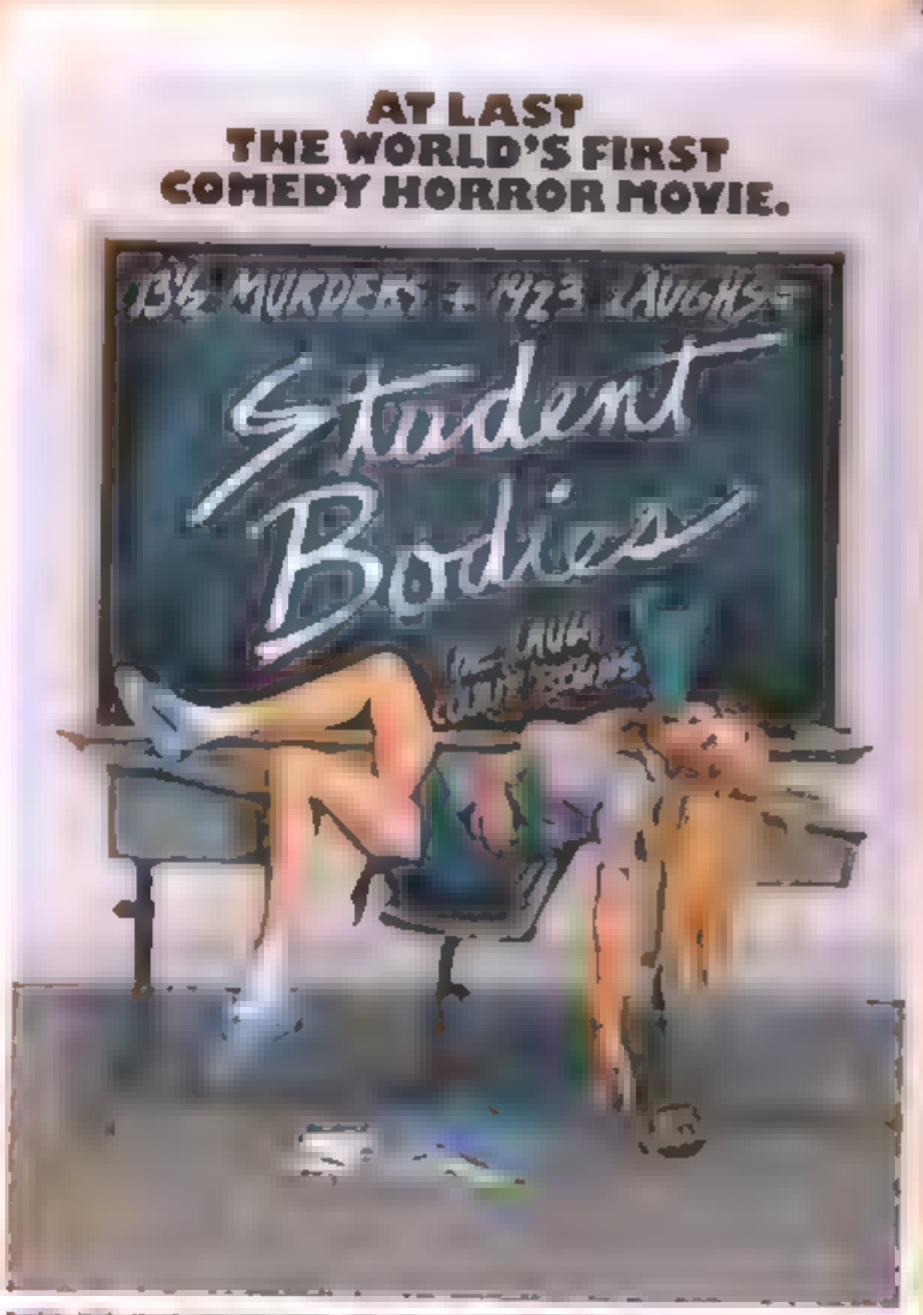
SLASHER SPOOFS (1978–84)

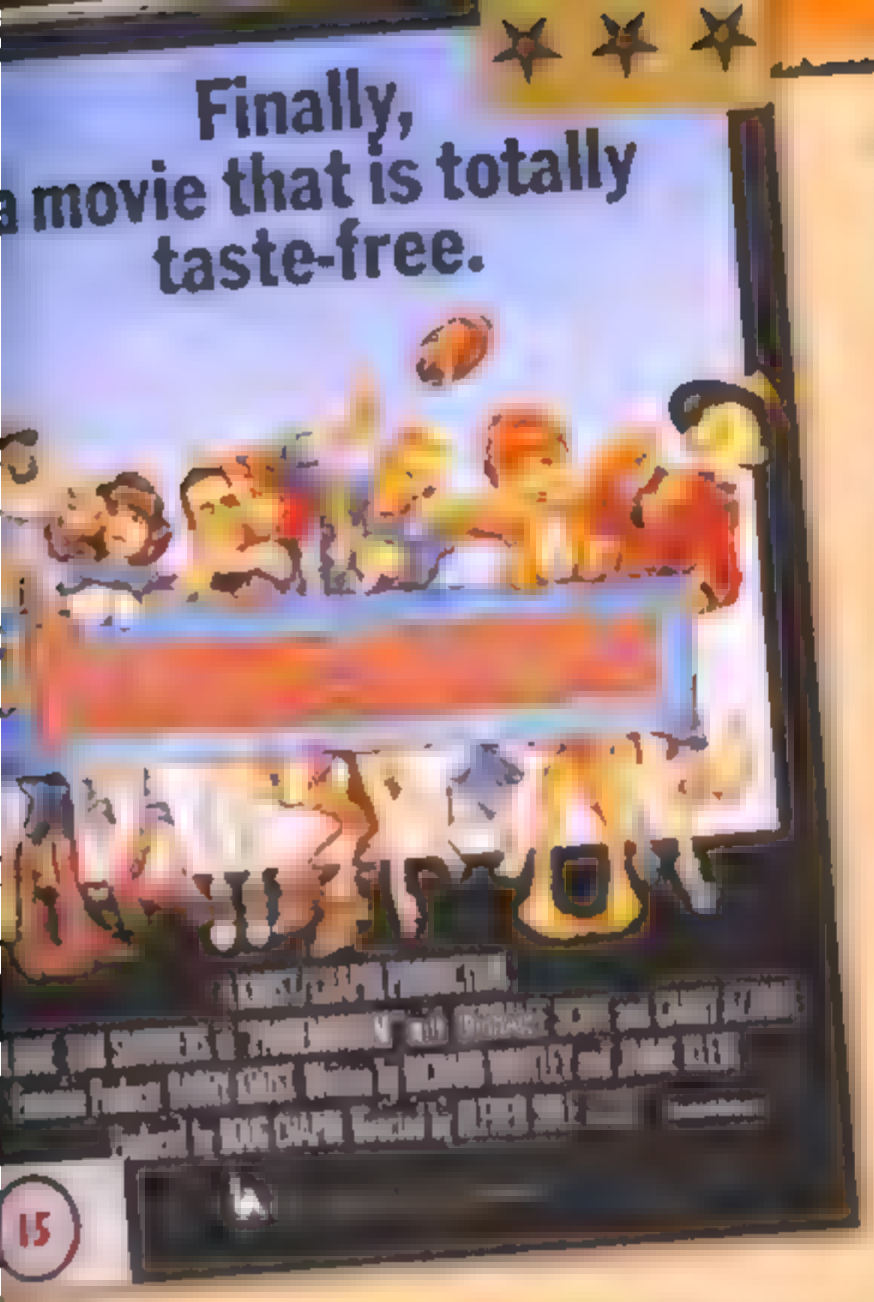
Horror spoofs were nothing new, as anyone who has seen an Abbott and Costello film (such as *Hold That Ghost*, 1941) will tell you. Many films – including the 'old dark house' chillers from the 1930s (see page 21) – attempted to balance horror with humour. However, the pattern for modern slasher spoofs was set after the release of *Psycho*. The shower scene from the film has become so iconic that it has been spoofed in a number of other movies

The release of both *Halloween* and *Friday the 13th* started a new run of spoofs of the subgenre in the early 1980s. Of course, when a popular genre is spoofed, it is usually a sign that the cycle is coming to an end – and that was certainly true of the slasher boom in the 1980s How could audiences continue to be terrified by plot devices and well worn cl chés when they were merc lessly dissected and p ayed for laughs in other contemporary films? It is a testament to the popularity of the slasher that it penodically bounces back into favour

Student Bodies (1981) was released during the height of popularity of the subgenre and was the first out-and-out spoof (see American poster artwork at right). It shows a house just like the one in *Halloween*; during a time lapse, it goes from *'Halloween'* to *'Friday the 13th'* to *'Jamie Lee Curtis's birthday.'* It features a killer called 'The Breather' who keeps on stepping in chewing gum as the camera focuses on his boots. He murders girls with everything from a paper clip to an eggplant and suffocates boys with garbage bags. There is also an on-screen body counter

Directed by Alfred Sole – who made the excellent proto-slasher *Communion* in 1976 – *Pandemonium* (1982) is set at a cheerleading academy, at which several teenagers had previously been murdered with a javelin. (See



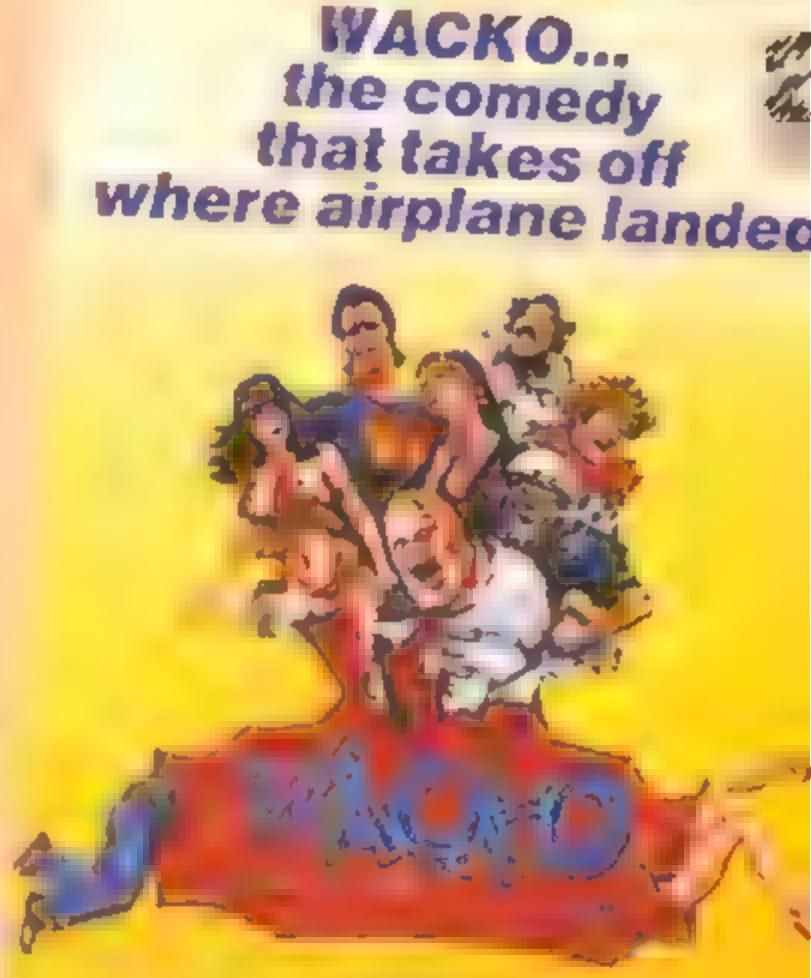


15

above for British video artwork). Almost 20 years later, a once-rejected cheerleader named Bambi reopens the academy. The film, which has a relatively star-studded cast, including Paul Reubens (who went on to fame as Pee Wee Herman) and Carol Kane (who appeared in *When a Stranger Calls*), is silly but amusing. A clever touch is the Canadian Mountie investigating the murders in an American town – a nod to Canadian slashers, such as *My Bloody Valentine* which passed themselves off as American to audiences (a common occurrence during the Golden Age, as filmmakers saw their biggest potential audience in the States and, rightly or wrongly presumed that they would rather see American teenagers sliced and diced).

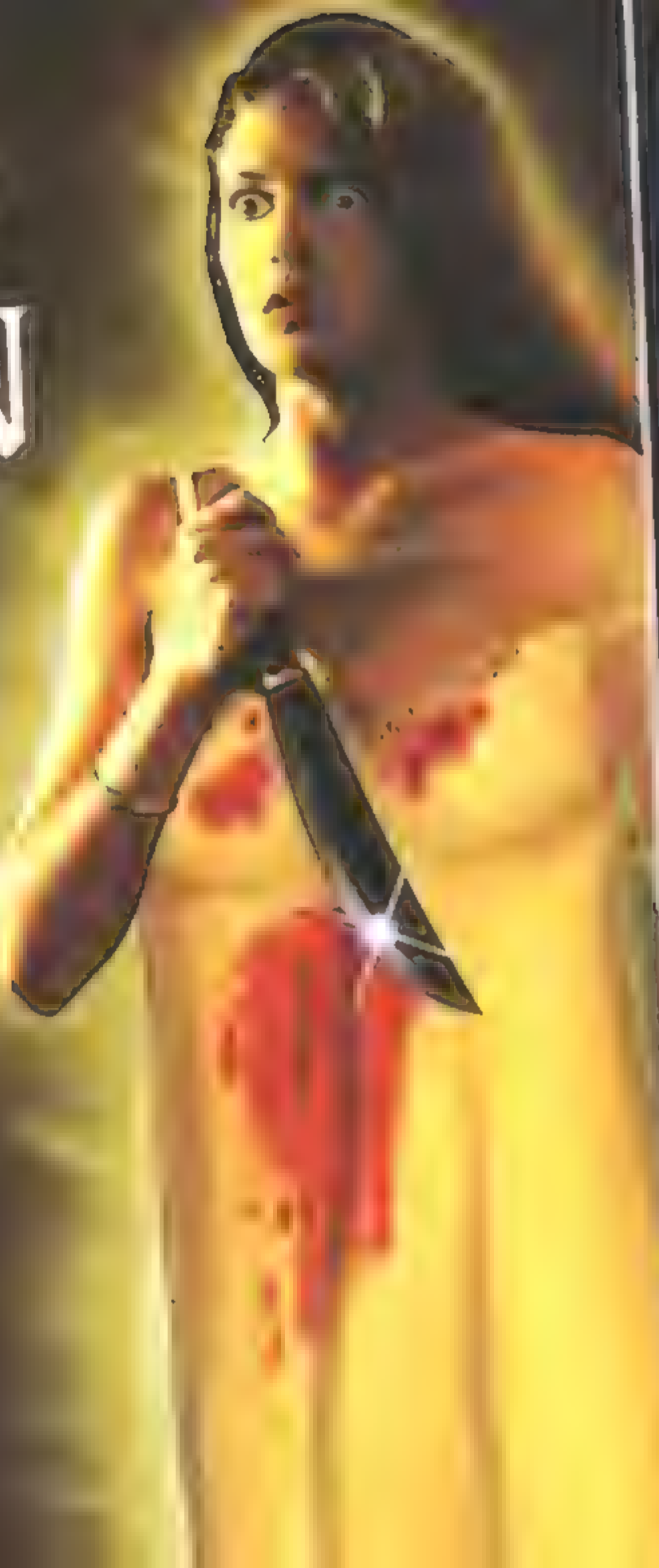
The National Lampoon crew turned their attention to spoofing the slasher with the woeful *Class Reunion* in 1982. *Wacko* was filmed in 1981 but not released until 1983. George Kennedy (from *Just before Dawn*) leads the cast against a pumpkin-headed serial killer who chases students on a lawnmower. With such characters as 'The Looney' and 'The Weirdo', the film is anything but subtle

The subgenre continued to get spoofed in everything from *Killer Party* (1986), *Return to Horror High* (1987) and John Waters's *Serial Mom* (1994). However, the slasher really hit pay dirt with the phenomenally successful *Scary Movie* franchise (which started in 2000 and launched off the success of *Scream* and *I Know What You Did Last Summer*). Despite its shortcomings, it was one of the few spoofs that made more money at the box office than the films it was satirizing



SWEET SIXTEEN

Why are all the boys dying to meet Melissa?



poster – showing a hand bursting out from a grave – has nothing to do with what is in the film but hints that the distributors were aware of the fading box-office draw of the slasher and were trying to hoodwink audiences into thinking they were going to

'Melissa is a big hit with the local boys.'

Lynda Day George also starred in *Mortuary* but had a bigger role as a policewoman who poses as a tennis ace in *Pieces*. Promising that you didn't have to go to Texas for a chainsaw massacre, this cheerful tale of bodily dismemberment at a Boston college has built up a reputation over the years as one of the worst – but, paradoxically if you like bad movies, best – early 1980s slashers. It is not hard to see why Blessed with half-decent production values, this Puerto Rican slasher was filmed in Boston and Madrid by an Italian-based American producer and a Spanish director Perhaps not surprisingly, it is a jumbled but heady brew of slasher movie violence, gore, bad acting, memorable dialogue and disco music.

Similarly, Jim Sotos's *Sweet 16* is memorable for its cheesiness. A new girl in town, the 15-year-old Melissa (Aleisa Shirley) is a big hit with the local boys. The trouble is any boy who takes a liking to

[redacted] the victims at the end of the killer's knife [redacted]

Despite the tender ages of much of the cast, the film is a heady brew of bad acting, implied paedophilia and violent murder. Of course, the reason the film is so well remembered is a twist ending that transcends the juvenile nature of the previous 90 minutes. Angela is actually a boy who has been forced to live his life as a girl, resulting in violent psychosis. The

[redacted] video artwork for Sweet Sixteen

final shot of a naked Angela holding the severed head of another teen and staring dementedly out of the screen with an open-mouthed grin is certainly creepy and unexpectedly powerful.

By 1983, pretty much every scenario and calendar date had been snapped up and used (and recycled) by slasher moviemakers. So it must have seemed like a great idea to take that 'hoary old ghost house built atop an Indian burial ground' movie cliche and turn it into a 'stalk 'n' slash' (although this had already been done in 1980 in *Ghost Dance*). From prolific low-budget filmmaker Fred Olen Ray, *Scalps* is not without its cheesy charms. An unlikely-looking group of archaeological students become possessed and are killed while on a dig. Ray boasted that *Scalps* – and especially the gory scalping special effects – was one of the most censored films in history. It got a limited theatrical release in 1984.

Another slasher film attempting to sell itself on the gore ticket was Buddy Cooper's cheap and remarkably nasty *The Mutilator*. A young boy accidentally kills his mother with his father's gun. Fast-forward several years and the boy – now a college student – is asked by his nearly estranged father to close up his summer house on the beach. He sets off with a group of friends, who are killed off, as the classic tag line says, 'By sword, by pick, by axe... bye bye!' It was eventually released to some theatres unrated, after being slapped with an X rating by the MPAA (thanks to Mark Shostrom's graphic gore effects).

However, the film encountered problems finding bookings in theatres that had a blanket ban on unrated material which was associated with hard-core pornography. Cooper went back and got an R rating for the film with cuts, but this – quite literally – ripped the guts from the movie. Finding himself without an audience, the director of *The Mutilator* lost a lot of money.

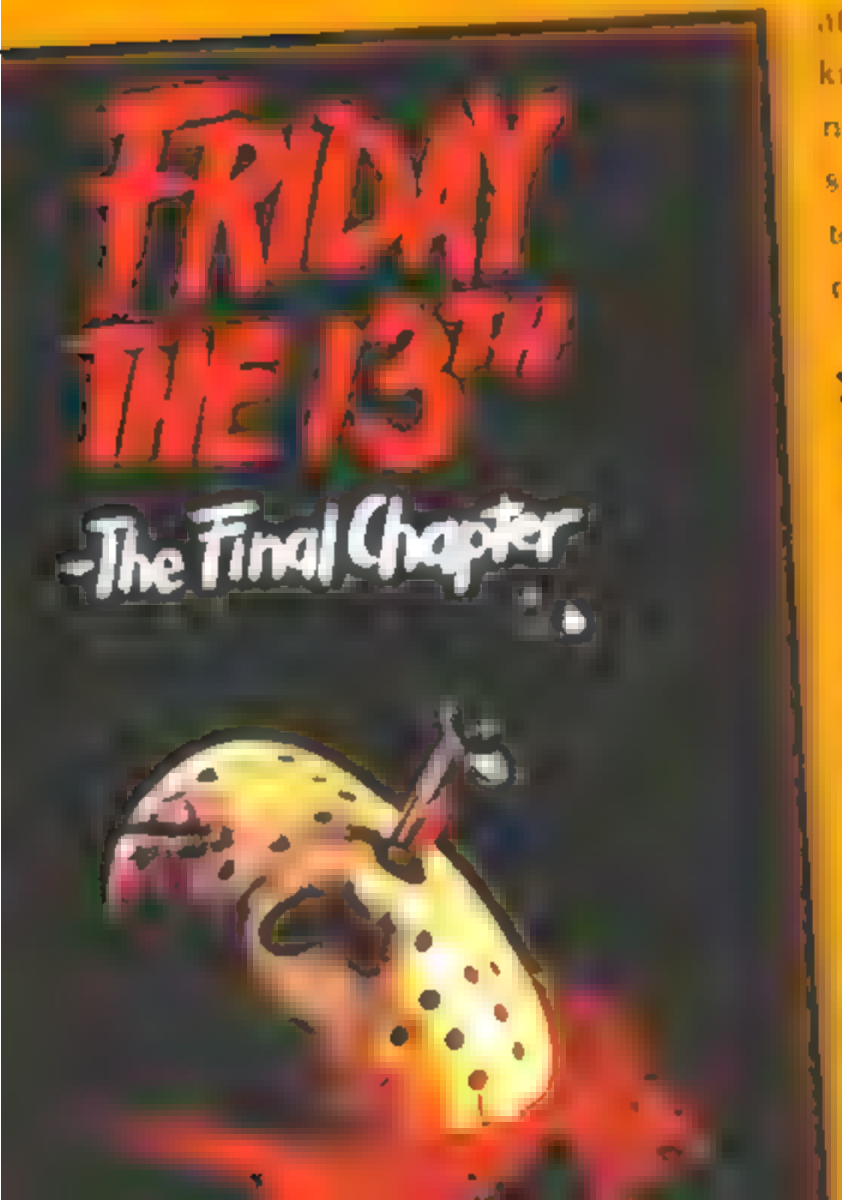
Mountaintop Motel Massacre was blessed with a great title and tagline – but sadly these were the only memorable things about this oddball production that sat on the shelf until 1986.

The first slasher film made directly for the home-video market was made in 1983. The plot of *Sledgehammer* is simplicity itself. A ragtag bunch of teens decide to hold a party at a remote house where sledgehammer murders happened 10 years ago. To no one's great surprise – certainly not the viewer's – the murders start afresh. In a nice bit of role reversal, the last man standing takes off his shirt to take on the killer for no other reason than to show off his six-pack (which could have something to do with the fact that he was *Playgirl* Man of the Month centrefold in March 1984). Shot for just $40,000, *Sledgehammer* made the most of the comparatively cheap technology – and a subgenre that was always cost conscious found an even thriftier avenue to go down.

THE DEFENDERS

1984 – THE END OF THE GOLDEN AGE

By 1984 the subgenre appeared to be on its last legs. Production of slashers had plummeted, and a whiff of desperation surrounded many of those that did go ahead.



Heads and hot nights! American poster artwork for *Friday the 13th: The Final Chapter*, and American poster artwork for *Splatter University* (right)

The major studios all but abandoned a subgenre that only a few years earlier had been a very profitable cash cow. Although it was rare to see slasher movies on the big screen, reissues and new video productions increasingly brought the subgenre to a whole new generation. Of course, as any aficionado of the slasher knows, the bogeyman never dies – and the subgenre wasn't ready to vanish completely off the radar just yet.

THE HIGHS OF 1984 . . .

Perhaps judging the public mood – and despite the impressive box office of *Part 3* in 1982 – the makers of *Friday the 13th: The Final Chapter* seemed ready to bring the saga of Camp Crystal Lake to a close. There was a palpable

'If Nancy doesn't wake up screaming she won't wake up at all . . .'

– A Nightmare on Elm Street

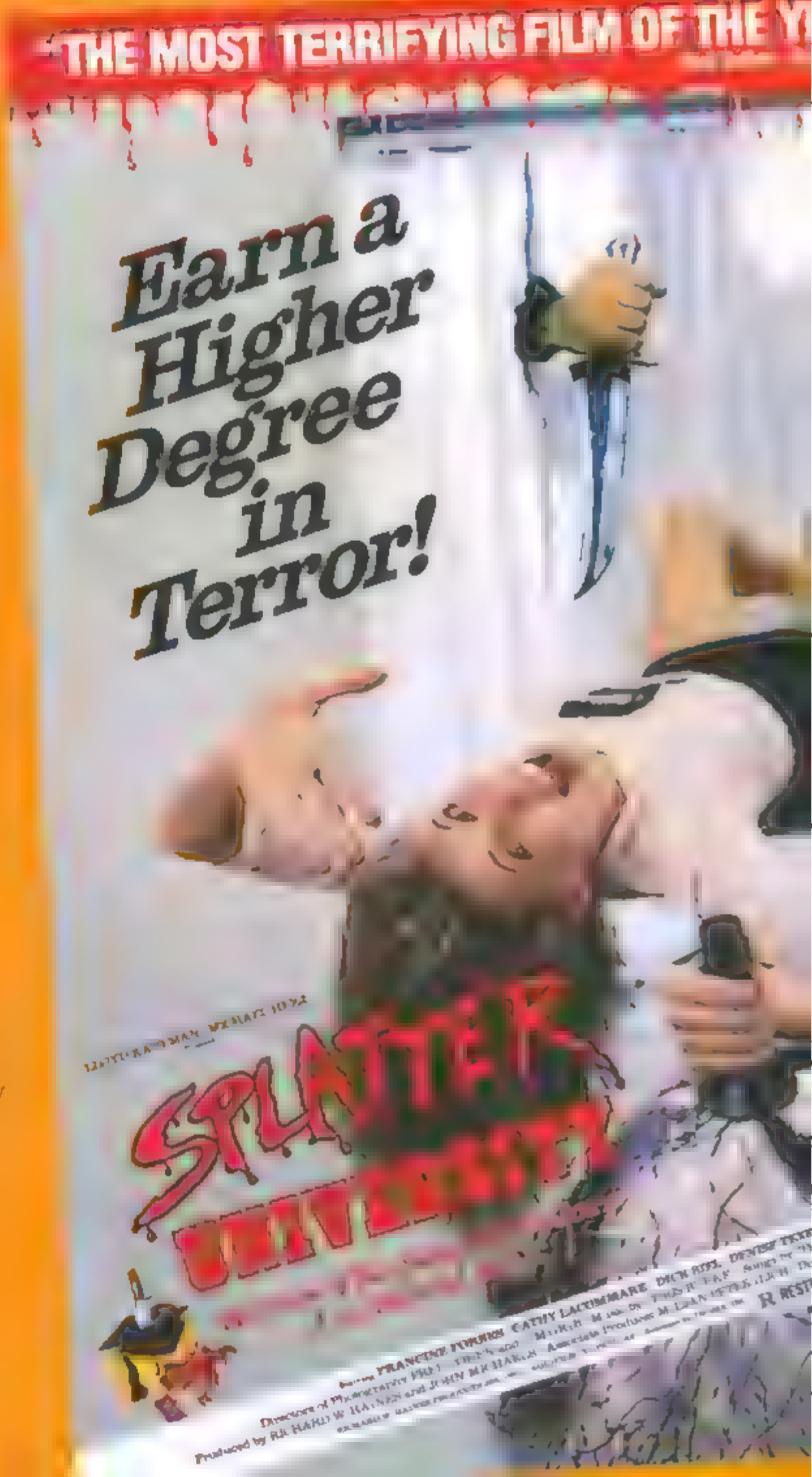
sense of anticipation on how it would all end. Of course, knowing not to mess with a successful formula, the filmmakers closely adhered to the previous three films' template. Another group of highly sexed teenagers come to party at the remote lakeside setting, and nearby is another [illegible] (eventual Final Girl Kimberly Beck) and her younger special-effects-obsessed brother (future teen pinup Corey Feldman). Jason rises from the dead and perhaps unsurprisingly, leaves a trail of bodies on the way back from the morgue to his old stomping ground to carry on where he left off. Joseph Zito – who previously directed *The Prowler* – did not have a lot of room to manoeuvre now that the formula

was set in stone. However, to his credit, *The Final Chapter* has a nice gothic feel all of its own and satisfies with the now pleasingly familiar mixture of light relief, T&A and shock. Tom Savini returned to ostensibly kill off the monster. Scaring up a massive $32 million at the domestic box office, it was clear that this wasn't to be the end of the series after all – even if audiences at the time were understandably naive enough to believe that it would be

. . . AND THE LOWS

At the other end of the spectrum was Troma's *Splatter University* – quite possibly the nadir of the subgenre and almost the final nail in its coffin. It is strictly amateur night at the morgue. Not able to decide whether it is a horror film or a comedy – it turns into the worst kind of misanthropic mess. Still, with characteristic optimism, Troma ordered 200 prints for the film's theatrical release.

Coming in at a close second to the bottom of the barrel is the zero-budget *Movie House Massacre*, which has usherettes stalked and slashed after a cinema is reopened. The killer is a hardly scary octogenarian in a tuxedo, who simply dodders up to his victims and stabs them bloodlessly. Hopeless as a horror movie, it works best when veering – purely intentionally – into John Waters's territory. Made by Rick Sloane – hiding under the pseudonym Alice Rayley – he somehow managed to persuade the super-talented



Students training for the Olympics are murdered by a discus-throwing killer in this luridly lurid American poster artwork for Stuart Margolin's 1984

. . . AND THOSE THAT DESERVED TO FARE BETTER

The Canadian production [illegible] was otherwise unexceptional but that it [illegible] and served [illegible] as [illegible] to [illegible] upon users of [illegible] Internet [illegible] closed-door [illegible] newsgroups [illegible] doesn't [illegible] somebody's name [illegible] of the victim [illegible] Crystal [illegible]

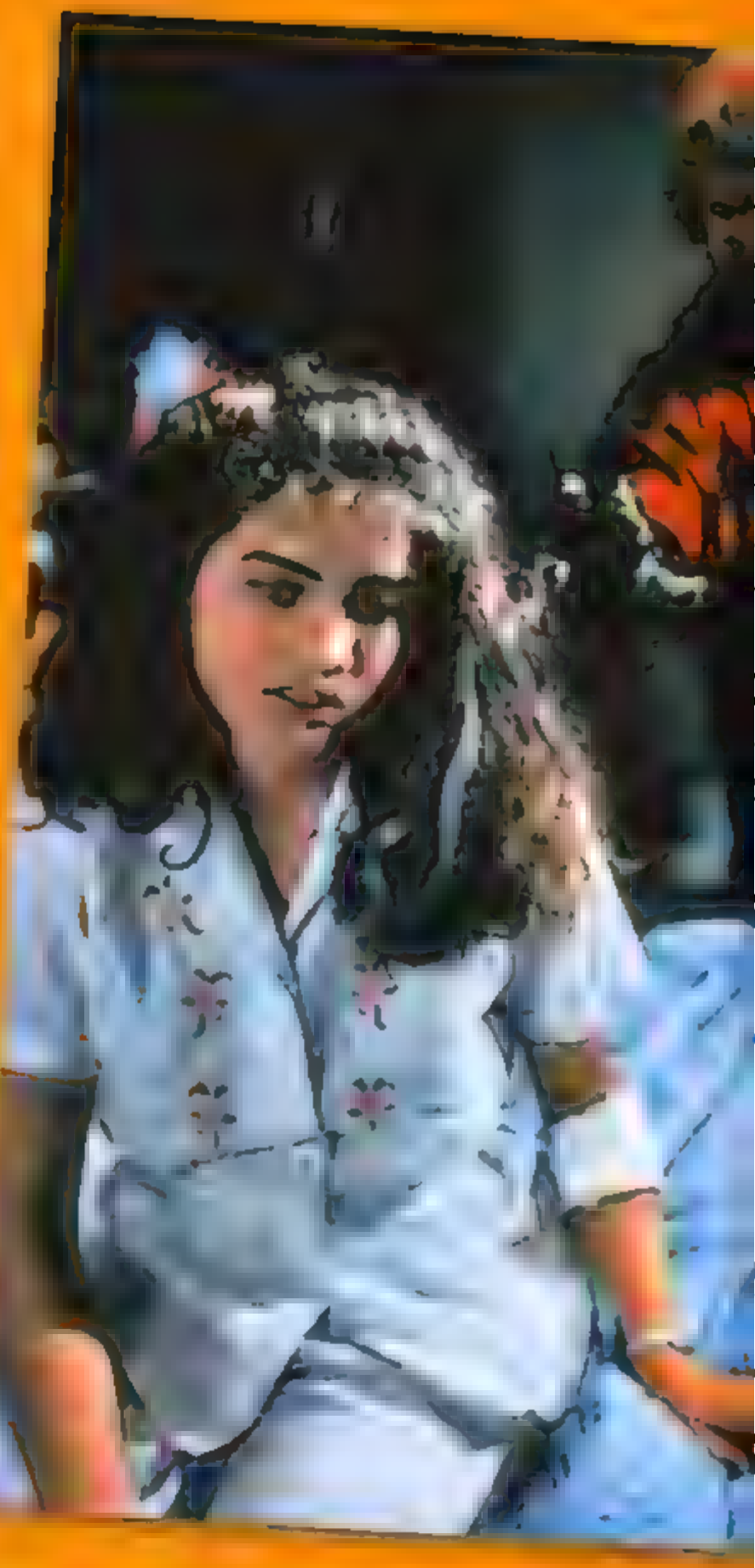
[illegible] to assassinate [illegible] human [illegible] to be free of [illegible] these [illegible] used [illegible]

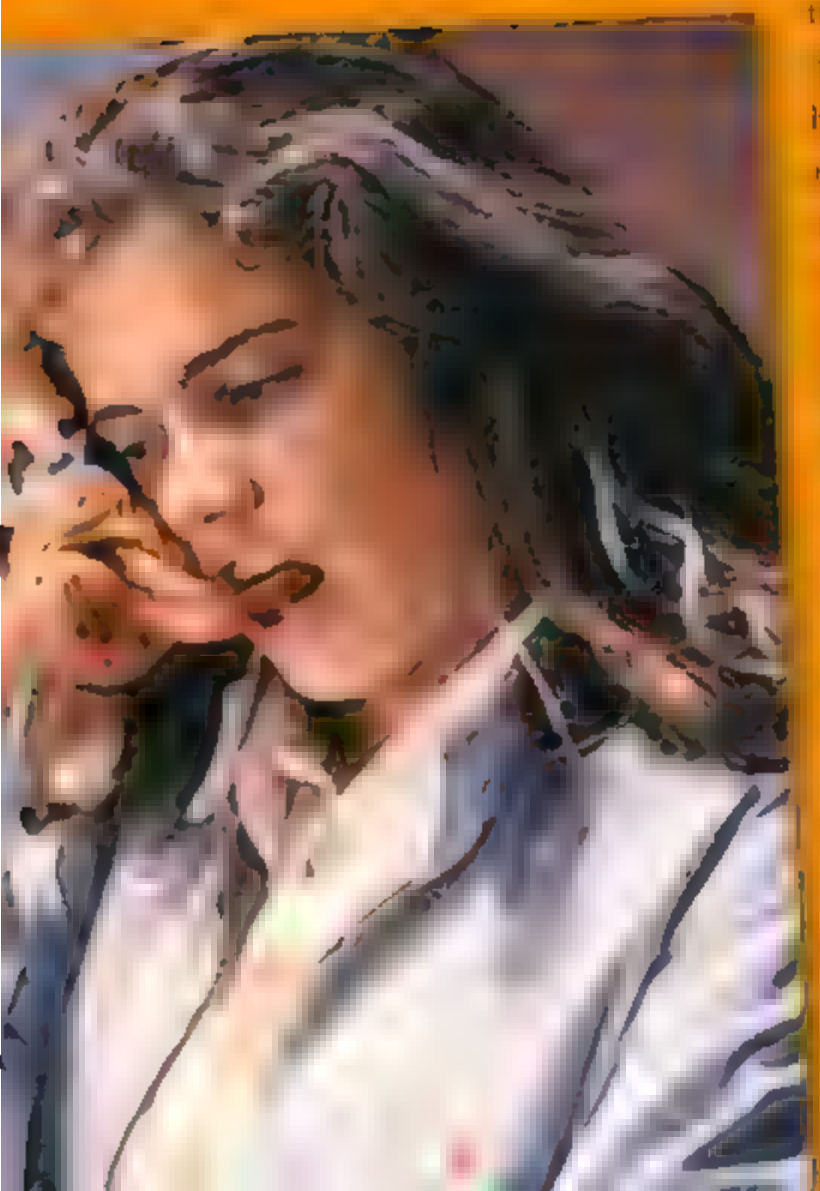
[illegible] Nevertheless [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]

HE'S OUT NOW...
The Terro
has just
begun!
SILENT MADNESS
IN 3-D
A MAG ENTERPRISES and SAE-JORY FILMS Production
SILENT MADNESS
Starring Belinda Montgomery • Viveca Lindfors • Sydney Lassick

Nancy is menaced by the murder of her dreams. Freddy Krueger in *A Nightmare on Elm Street*

British promotional artwork for *A Nightmare on Elm Street*





[illegible] Bronx [illegible] to put [illegible] work into its [illegible]. Wes stood on [illegible] theatre owners and the press [illegible] to the [illegible] being put [illegible] from other cinemas across the country, but [illegible] box office figures despite a lot of the public's prejudices, so he'd [illegible] to do was [illegible] and [illegible] less than $2.5 million, [illegible] already.

A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET

When interest [illegible] began to build around Wes Craven's *A Nightmare on Elm Street* seemed to come out of left field and [illegible] to revitalize the [illegible] movie. Craven had toyed with the [illegible] before with *The Last House on the Left*, however he was frustrated that the subject he had really helped create had still not been treated [illegible] than [illegible] having developed what would become *A Nightmare on Elm Street* [illegible] Craven got the feeling that time was fast running out as the subject looked to be [illegible] dead in the water within a year. He had the idea that his script could be a [illegible] boogeyman, the [illegible] was scarred Freddy Krueger [illegible] would [illegible] the [illegible] [illegible] of adolescents [illegible] (continued on page 152)

A Nightmare on Elm Street and especially Krueger became a [illegible] phenomenon. On release in [illegible] 8 million, which

A young library [illegible] reads a book of poetry in a [illegible] Encanto.

A [illegible] photo American poster for [illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

They pledge themselves to be young, stay young... and die young.

THE INITIATION

...the night new blood is pledged.

THE INITIATION
VERA MILES — CLU GULAGER
JAMES READ — DAPHNE ZUNIGA
CHARLES PRATT, JR.
BRUCE LANSBURY — JOCK GAYNOR
SCOTT WINANT — LARRY STEWART
NEW WORLD PICTURES

INTERNATIONAL SLASHING (1978–84)

While the slasher movie had many international influences prior to *Halloween*, the boom in 'stalk 'n' slash' that followed was mostly made up of American and a few Canadian examples. However, other countries around the globe were also getting in on the act.

BRITAIN

AUSTRALIA

Halloween. The first, *Snapshot* (1979), wore its heart on its sleeve – despite not really being a slasher movie as such – by being brazenly released in the States as *Day After*

However, if this was the best that Australia had to offer, then psychotic-handyman-versus-pop-star opus *Lady Stay Dead* (1981) must surely be the worst

P. J. Soles – Lynda in *Halloween* – made her return to the subgenre in the ludicrous *Innocent Prey* (1984), from writer-director Colin Eggleston, who also wrote the Australian theatre-based slasher *Nightmares* (1980). Needless to say, it wasn't as accomplished as Carpenter's film

position as the Final Girl. She is, however, hampered by one of the worst perms ever committed to celluloid

ITALY

In Italy the popularity of the *giallo* had long since diminished. However, there were a number of notable exceptions, including Dario Argento's *Tenebre* (1982). Also Lamberto Bava's *A Blade in the Dark* (*La casa con la scala nel buio*, 1983), in which a composer tries to score a horror movie, as people begin to die for real.

Both are perfect examples of films that satisfy as *giallo* but also show the influence of the then in-vogue American slasher

Influenced even further by the American slasher movie was Italian director Joe D'Amato. His *Antropophagus* (1980) has a group of hapless tourists pursued by a cannibalistic madman on a Greek island. Following it was the director's remake-cum-sequel *Absurd* (*Rosso sangue*, 1981). George Eastman again plays a variation on the same monster who escapes from a hospital

EVERYONE HAS A SLASHER

Lives by Night (*Ye ying hun*, 1982), which finds a transvestite stalking a female radio host. New Zealand (in an Australian coproduction) made its own dead-teenager movie, *Dead Kids* (1981), set in the United

VIDEO HELL AND THE FRANCHISES (1985–95)

By 1985, the slasher movie was almost in the doldrums, but it didn't curl up and die – the video revolution was around the corner. Except for a few successful franchises and mainstream thrillers, the subgenre seemed condemned to straight-to-video hell.

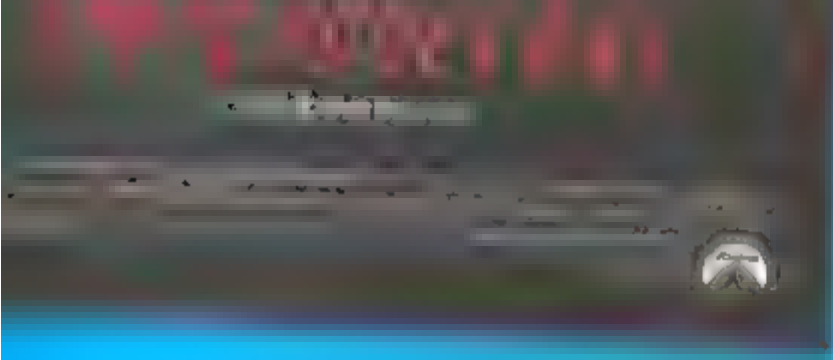
Right American video artwork for *Blood Cult*

Without the backing of major studios or [illegible] features for theatrical release, the slasher movie entered its wilderness years. The video revolution had given new life to all movies, but along with pornography, horror was arguably the most popular genre for home viewing. And slasher movies came back to scare with new vigour, courtesy of hulking VCRs. Although the financial returns were down, the potential to turn a profit – especially with the cheaper new medium of video – was too difficult to resist for many. Mirroring punk rock, the slasher movie took the DIY idea that 'anyone could do it' to new heights. Anyone *could* do it, but unfortunately, few could do it well.

To list all of the slasher movies made post-1985 would take another book and a half. However, starting at the very bottom of the barrel is *Blood Cult* (1985), which features some anonymous wacko carving up coeds with a highly polished meat cleaver on a small Midwestern campus. So

'Anyone could do it, but . . . few could do it well.'

Guess who's going to be the life of the party?



VIDEO REEL

13

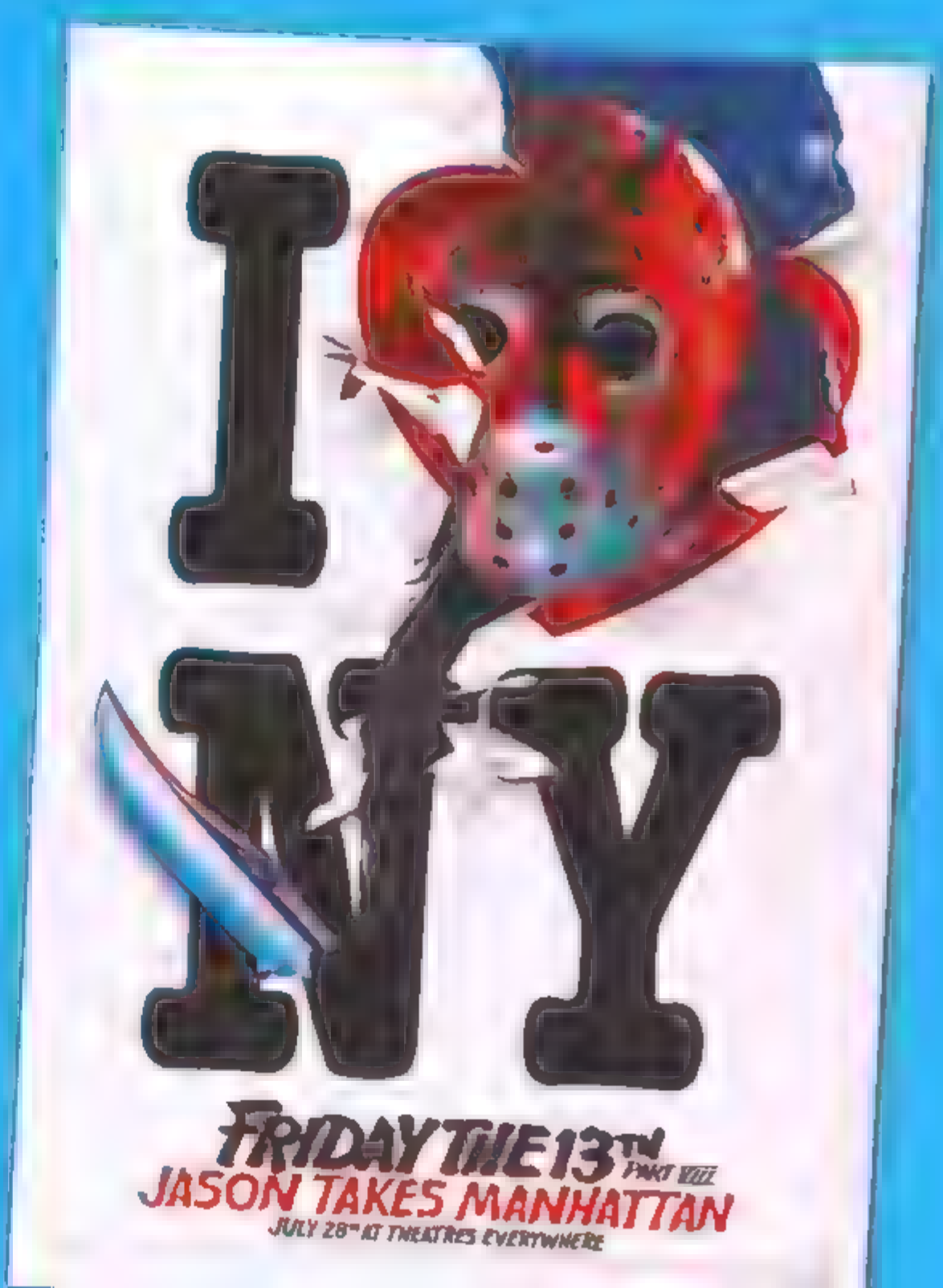
3
DREAM WARRIORS

in *Child's Play* (1988). Taking its lead from killer-doll opuses such as *Dead of Night* (1945) and *Trilogy of Terror* (1975), it exploits childhood fears when a 'Chucky' doll is possessed by the spirit of a murderer and terrorizes a young boy and his mother [illegible] that audiences still respond to fresh ideas: it made $33,244,684 – enough [illegible]nerate two sequels in 1990 and 1991.

THE END OF THE SUBGENRE?

Perhaps the series' nadir, *Friday the 13th Part VIII: Jason Takes Manhattan* (1989) took a fun idea – putting Jason Voorhees in New York City (the joke being that he hits it) – and had it defeated by budgetary limitations, most of the film takes place on the boat journey there. The box office produced a paltry $14,343,976. In a reversal of fortunes, Freddy also lost his sparkle in *A Nightmare on Elm Street: The Dream Child* (1989); it proved to be a sequel too far, taking $22,168,359, which was less than half of what its predecessor took the year before. The year saw another turning point for the subgenre with *Halloween: The Revenge of Michael Myers* (1989), it had been hurried into production after the success of the previous instalment. Despite some nice gothic touches, it was a rush job and it shows. Audience interest dwindled, the movie made just $11,612,254 at the American box office.

Just as *Friday the 13th: The Final Chapter* had hoodwinked audiences, they fell for it again with *Freddy's Dead: The Final Nightmare* (1991). Ostensibly the last in the series, it was, of course, nothing of the kind. Sadly though, audiences found Freddy more a buffoon than the sinister figure he had been in the first film. The anticlimactic and frankly subpar 3D used in the last 10 minutes was oddly fitting for a franchise that had clearly run out of creative steam. Still, with a box-office take of $34,872,033, it was obvious that Freddy would be back to haunt dreams again.



A 1989 Advance American poster artwork for *Friday the 13th Part VIII: Jason Takes Manhattan*

SLASHER MOVIES' INFLUENCE ON THE MAINSTREAM

While outside the franchise juggernauts that steamrollered through the 1980s, mainstream Hollywood didn't make slasher movies in the purest sense. But that didn't stop them from raiding the subgenre's toy box for ideas to pep up pedestrian thrillers. From creative body counts and shock jumps to killers who weren't really dead and subjective camera work, the slasher movie s influence was widely felt – but not given any credit, of course

Jagged Edge (1985) led the move into the mainstream, as teenagers gave way to older victims (see Amencan poster art at far right) The first five minutes are pure slasher, with POV shots leading to the murder of a woman by a knife-wielding maniac on a dark and stormy night. However, much of the rest, except for a short burst of slasher-style thrills at its close, is standard thriller fare. It was a sizable hit, with over $40 million at the domestic box office

Adrian Lyne s *Fatal Attraction* (1987) was another example of how the slasher moved into the mainstream. While most of the

film is a fairly orthodox thriller (albeit more erotically charged than most), it is the ending that marks out its magpie nature. Originally, the finale was more downbeat and subdued, but reshoots had the supposedly dead villain fly from a full bathtub like a screaming banshee. Anyone who has seen *Friday the 13th* will tell you that it is pure Camp Crystal Lake. The slasher shock ending propelled *Fatal Attraction* from a so-so thriller to a box-office champ as the second highest-grossing film in America in 1987, with an impressive domestic haul of $156,645,693.

Director Joseph Ruben (who directed *The Stepfather* in 1987) hit pay dirt with familial dysfunction in a polished variation on the subgenre. The idea of Julia Roberts in a slasher movie may seem absurd, but *Sleeping with the Enemy* (1991), which features Roberts as an abused wife trying everything to escape a violent husband, jettisons routine thriller and borrows all the tricks in the book during a frenzied finale.

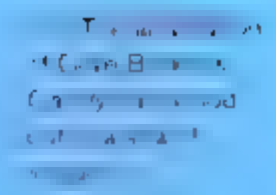
Towards the mid-1990s mainstream thrillers continued borrowing elements from slashers. Among them was a psycho nanny in *The Hand That Rocks the Cradle* (1992), a psycho roommate in *Single White Female* (1992), and a psycho secretary in *The Temp* (1993). All had female villains, as oestrogen briefly beat out testosterone in the celluloid rage stakes. The subgenre continued to diversify within the mainstream, and it blossomed in the low-budget field of straight-to-video terror. Soon, widespread public interest all but waned for the genre, which was mired in cliché and repetition.

CANDYMAN BREAKS THE MOULD

An anomaly compared to the endless cycle of increasingly cheesy slasher sequels was Bernard Rose's intelligent and visually striking *Candyman* (1992). Based on the short story by Clive Barker, it has the eponymous villain – played by Tony Todd, the first black slasher movie antihero – who appears and kills those foolish enough to say his name in the mirror five times. It anticipated the films that took similar folklore as its hook, most notably *Urban Legend* (1998).

Atypically based in a deprived and black inner-city neighbourhood, it was also the inspiration for other markedly less-successful genre films that moved their location to a more urban setting, including *Hood of Horror* (2006). Its $25,792,310 takings at the box office was enough to generate two sequels in 1995 and 1999 – as well as arguably providing the impetus for the slashers' rebirth several years later, with films such as *New Nightmare* (1994) and *Scream* (1996).

New Line Cinema acquired the rights to the *Friday the 13th* franchise – with an eye on the inevitable *Freddy vs. Jason* monster mash that eventually came 10 years later – and attempted to breath new life into it with *Jason Goes to Hell: The Final Friday* (1993). The results were decidedly mixed, with an ill-advised body-hopping storyline. A mediocre box office of just $15,935,068 showed that audiences weren't yet hungry for the resurrection of Jason Voorhees.



Unexpectedly, Wes Craven – who had briefly revived the subgenre in 1984 with *A Nightmare on Elm Street* – was up to new yet familiar tricks with *New Nightmare* (1994). With a clever concept that was strikingly original at the time, Craven utilized characters from the *Nightmare* universe, including Heather Langenkamp and Robert Englund. They played themselves and were terrorized by the Freddy Krueger character, who had now crossed from reel life to real life.

With one eye on the financial successes of the past, it also had an eye on the future and single-handedly led to the subgenre's postmodern second coming with the release of yet another Craven film in 1996. *New Nightmare* was a meagre success with a $18,090,181 take at the box office.

Halloween: The Curse of Michael Myers (1995) was the famously troubled sixth instalment in the *Halloween* franchise. Sections were hurriedly re-shot after disastrous test screenings. It is at least notable for the last film appearance of genre stalwart Donald Pleasence. It made just $15,116,634.

INTERNATIONAL SLASHING (1985–95)

As general interest in the subgenre shrunk in the United States, it was the same story internationally. Production of slashers slowed – although they were briefly buoyed by the phenomenal success of the *Nightmare on Elm Street* series.

MEXICO

SWEDEN

A American video artwork for *Goodnight, God*

ITALY AGAIN

The production of *giallo* also decreased significantly since its early 1970s heyday. However they did periodically appear, with Dario Argento, Lamberto Bava and Ruggero Deodato still peddling their craft with increasingly mixed results.

Former Argento acolyte Michele Soavi perhaps scored the best slasher/*giallo* crossover with his feature debut *StageFright: Aquarius* (*Deliria*, 1987). The plot is simplicity itself: an actor escapes from an asylum and then, wearing a giant owl mask, stalks actors at a theatre during rehearsals. The juxtaposition of the single-mindedness of the American slasher movie and the undeniable stylishness of the Italian *giallo* struck subgenre gold. However Deodato's backwoods slasher, *Bodycount* (*Camping del terrore*, 1987), jettisons all Italian qualities and is almost slavish in its attempts to be American.

UNITED KINGDOM, SPAIN AND JAPAN

The United Kingdom scored its own goal with the dreadful killer-priest opus *Goodnight, God Bless* (1987). From Spain came the surreal *Anguish* (*Angustia*, 1987). Set in a cinema, it played upon the same audience fears as Lamberto Bava's tremendously entertaining monster mash *Demons* (*Demoni*, 1986): that something lurks at the multiplex. Surprisingly, despite the huge popularity of North American slasher movies in Japan, there were precious few examples to come out of the country, although the nastily surreal *Evil Dead Trap* (*Shiryô no wana*, 1988) is an interesting anomaly.

AUSTRALIA

Last – and certainly least – is the mind bogglingly awful *Houseboat Horror* (1989) from Australia. An abomination from start to finish, the cast is stalked by a hideously scarred madman. Perhaps only of interest is that it stars Alan Dale, who gets his head split in half with a machete but afterwards went on to a Hollywood career in films such as *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull* (2008). Thankfully, *Symphony of Evil* (1987) and *Blackeagle* (1990) went some to alleviate the Antipodean shame.

GOODNIGHT
GOD BLESS
YOUR NIGHTMARES
HAVE JUST BEGUN

SCREAM AND SCREAM AGAIN (1996 ONWARD)

By 1996, the slasher movie was pretty much dead in the water. Therefore, its surprising resurrection with *Scream* (1996) was proof that this really is the subgenre that just won't stay dead.

A box-office smash at the tail end of the year, *Scream* skilfully juggled postmodern humour and visceral horror – a case of being in the right place at the right time. It played on the nostalgia of those who had packed screens during the slasher's heyday in the early 1980s. It also appealed to a younger audience who saw their contemporaries sliced and diced by homicidal maniacs for the first time. In a decade where pop culture was cannibalizing itself, a film that exploited this and worked as a straightforward slasher was on target to be a runaway hit.

'Sidney, how does it feel to be almost brutally butchered?'

– Reporter, *Scream*

A NEW AGE OF SLASHERS

Scream was the brainchild of fledgling screenwriter Kevin Williamson, a self-confessed fan of Golden Age slashers. Originally entitled *Scary Movie*, the twist in *Scream* is that the teenage characters are well versed in slasher movie lore and know all the clichés, comparing scenes from their favourite subgenre movies to a series of brutal murders rocking their small town. The fact that the audience was also aware of those same clichés added to the fun and helped propel the movie to a whopping domestic gross of $103,046,663 on a budget of just $14 million.

After touting the script around Hollywood, Williamson sold the rights to Miramax, which bought it for its new Dimension Films label. The makers of *Scream* secured something of a horror coup by tempting director Wes Craven aboard.

Despite being worn by different characters throughout the franchise, the killer in *Scream* is Ghostface, who sports a distorted mask based on the painting *The Scream* by Edvard Munch. Williamson

Above British poster artwork for *Scream*

[illegible] villain – a movie that has sunk [illegible] while [illegible] cameras [illegible] a script that been exhi[illegible]

Hedging their bets, posters for the film announced *Scream* as a 'new thriller' from Craven. They didn't need to worry. The positive critical and financial reception [illegible] film hinted that [illegible] was way back from the [illegible] stellar box-office turnout of Williamson's follow-up the next year, [illegible]

I KNOW
WHAT YOU DID
LAST SUMMER

THE RETURN OF THE SEQUEL

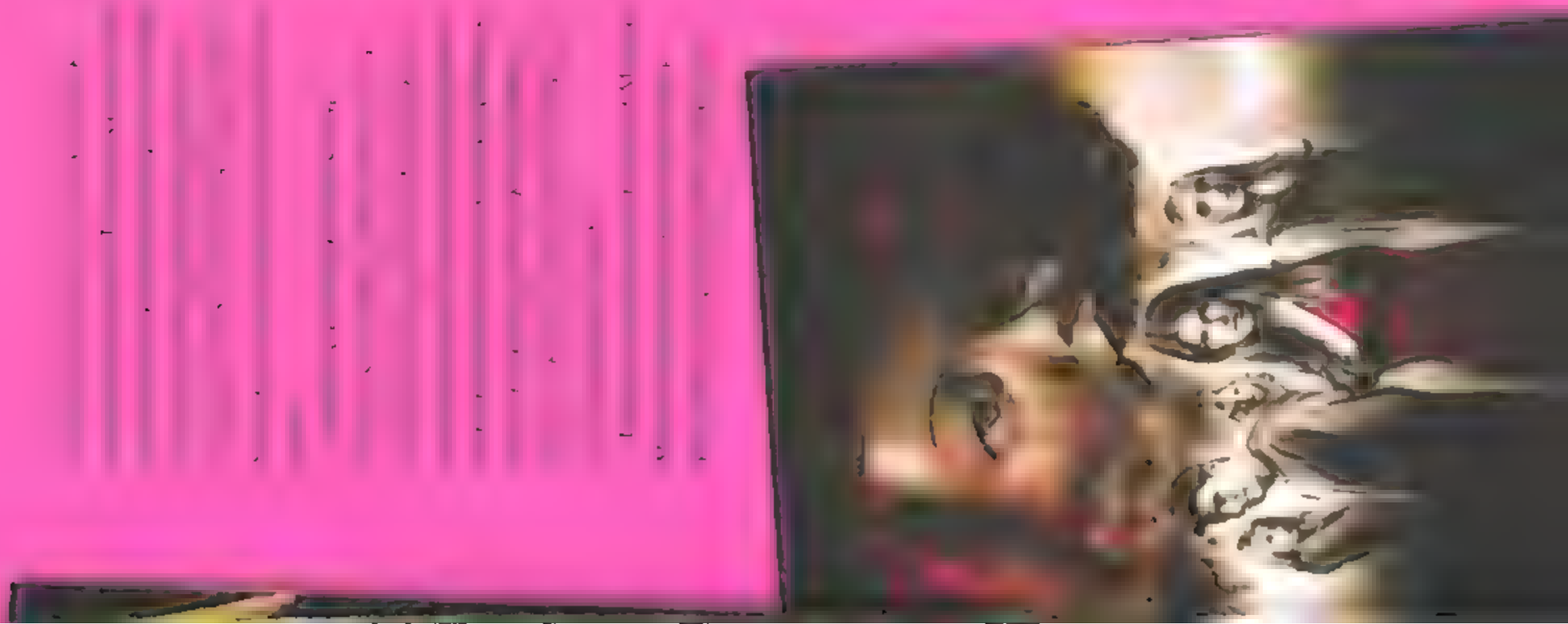
AND STILL MORE COME

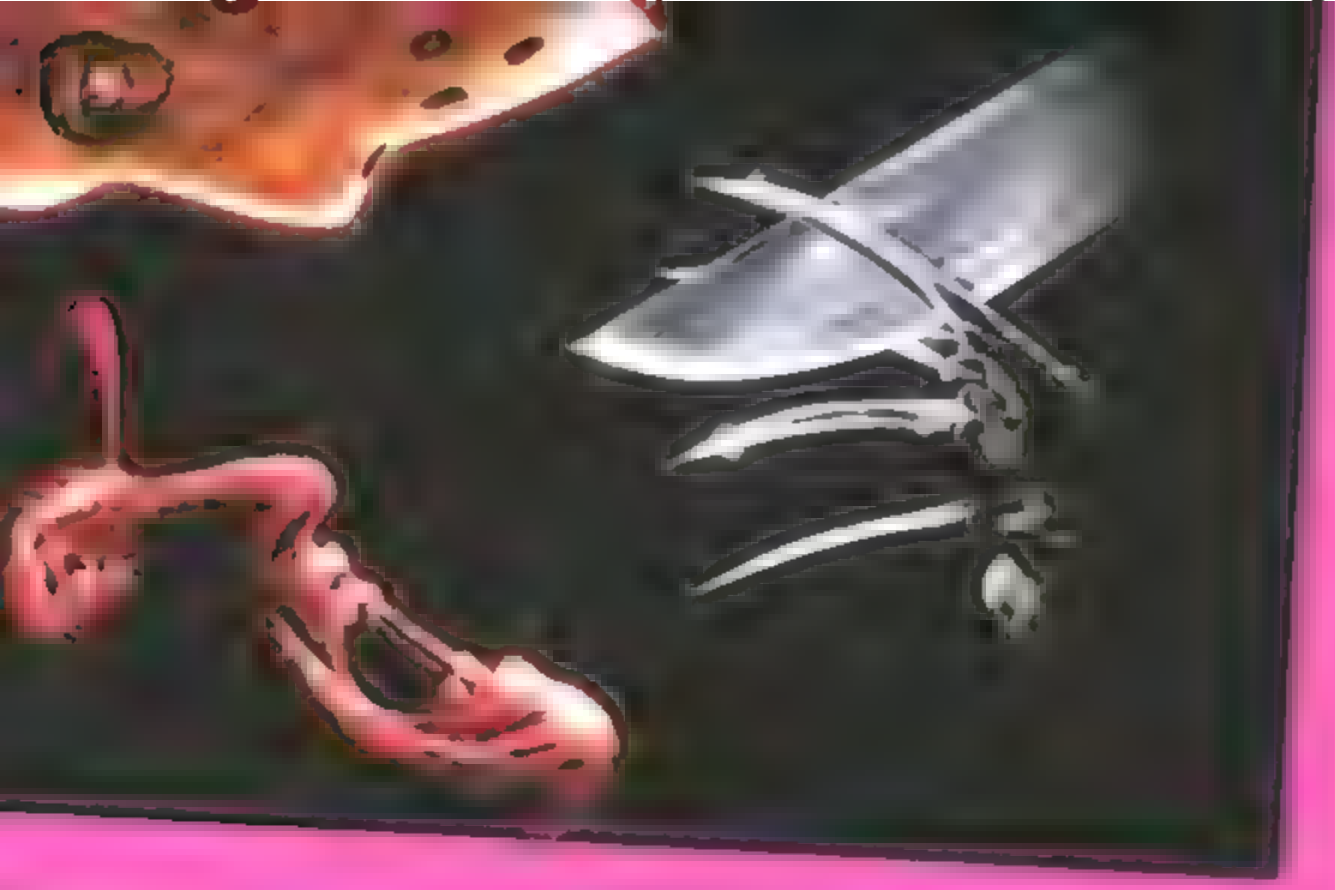
'Based on an urban legend, it has another hook-handed killer targeting a group of teens.'

British movie poster for Cherry Falls and American DVD artwork for Urban Legends: Final Cut

REINVENTING THE GENRE

HELLBENT





for maximum commercial appea
nd lost some of the magic in the
rocess. It was eventually followed
by a prequ
which purports to show the gene
f Leatherface and his murdero
lan. It garnered a reduced but stil

More inbred crazies populated
Wrong Turn (2003), a violent, fast
paced, well-acted and exciting
throwback to the backwoods
horror typified by *Just Befo*
Dawn 20 years earlier. A
young people are mar
he forest of West Vi
to a clan of cannibals
to mak
But worldwid

AN INFLUENTIAL GENRE

Murders in and around a
xclusive school are not all they
seem in the disappointing
much is so timid it
st seems embarrassed to be
movie. Producers of
ubgenre increasingly figured
they could ring more money
from younger filmgoers by g
for the less-restrictive PG
mind to avoid
absurdities is the remake of
House of Wax (2005).
original was a forerunner

MAY ALL YOUR CHRISTMASES BE BLACK . . AGAIN

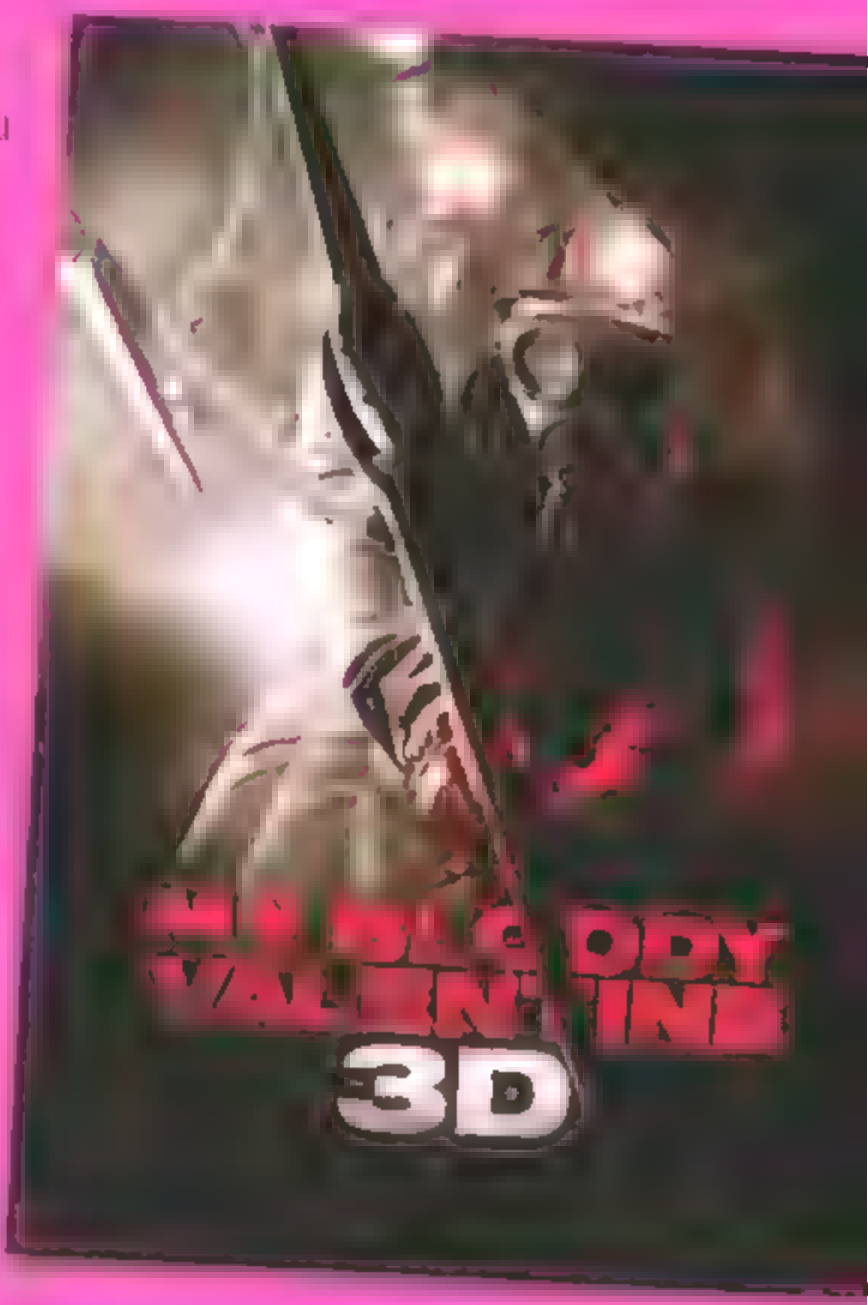
This holiday season, the slay ride beg
BLACK
MAS

film did at the box office.

looked vibrant, the remake of *Prom Night* (2008) was the slasher equivalent of watching paint dry; it was so vapid and bland it was hardly even there. In essence, only the name was taken – the film finds a teenage girl stalked by a deranged ex-teacher, who kills her friends at a hotel on prom night. It is rather like the teenage TV show *The O.C.* with a body count, only not as scary. While the PG-13 rating prevented the inclusion of many of the elements that made Golden Age slasher movies so enjoyable, it did allow a young audience to drive this box-office success, with $43,869,350 in the bank. Diametrically

showed that the slasher film could still

The remake juggernaut rolled into 2009 with somewhat better results. From Lionsgate, the makers of the *My Bloody Valentine* (2009) redux clearly knew what made the best early 1980s slashers tick. While it is never going to be great art, it is great fun – a bonus on the increasingly soulless remake conveyor belt. It didn't stick closely to the original, but remained least sympathetic to it, with a homicidal miner wielding a pickaxe and again terrorizing a small mining town. To add to the roller-coaster, carnival feel of the film, it serves up impressively bloody special effects and does it all in 3D. The other bonus was that it generated enough interest to see the 1981 original released to DVD in all its uncut glory which satisfied the calls of many fans over the years. Proving that both slasher



ALL ABOARD THE REMAKE TRAIN

INTERNATIONAL SLASHING (1996 ONWARD)

Scream, and perhaps more so, _I Know What You Did Last Summer_, reignited interest in the subgenre around the world, although it took a little while for the boom to start.

ASIA

In Asia Hong Kong's *The Deadly Camp*

from the backwoods slas

the early 1980s South Korea wa

especially prolific in kick-starting the trend with *Bloody Beach* (*Hacme*

2000) in which friends get murdered

while on a beach vacation *A*

C (2001) followed mixing the supernatural chills of the phenomenally popular Japanese film *Ringu* (1998) wit typical slasher revenge angle *The Record* (*Zekkumaon nakmeunda* 200 was an entertaining and trashy variation of *I Know What You Did Last Summ* *Bloody Reunion* (*Seuseung ui eumhue* 2006) what predictably mixed the to *Hostel* with the subgenre and Taiwa followed suit with *Invitation Only* (*Jue* *out a.a* 2008)

Thailand's contributions to the subgenre are the back-jungle slasher *Scared* (*Ra* *Klua ni seuaeng khwan* 2005) and the manhunt thriller *Slice* (*Cheun* 2009

AUSTRALIA

Ringwald, who, although she had never made a horror movie before, is intrinsically linked to the 1980s through films such as *The Breakfast Club* (1985) and *Pretty in Pink* (1986).

INDIA

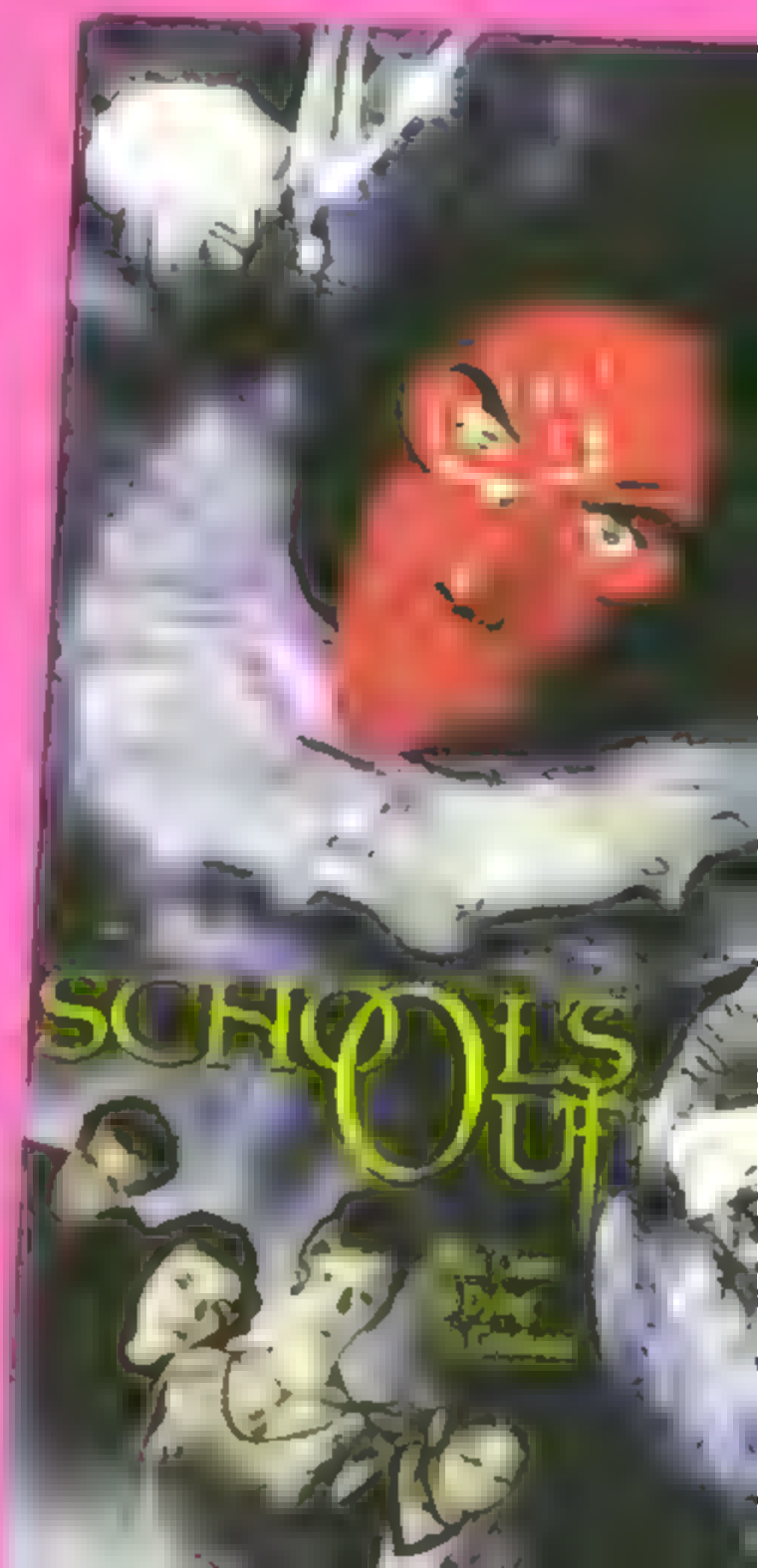
India produced what is perhaps the first-ever all-singing-all-dancing slasher movie with *Kuch To Hai* (2003). Another variation of *I Know What You Did Last Summer*, it quite shamelessly recreates whole sequences from that film, its sequel and *Urban Legend*. The same year's *Sssshhh* continued Bollywood's magpie tendencies, taking *Scream* as its main inspiration. *Dhund: The Fog* (also 2003) followed with somewhat less delirious results.

EUROPE

Sweden contributed the awful and highly derivative *Camp Slaughter* (2004), which, perhaps unwisely, took its killer's bag-head look directly from Jason's fashion faux pas in the original *Friday the 13th Part 2*.

Just like in the early 1980s, the late 1990s slasher boom failed to resurrect the *giallo* in Italy in any significant way. Apart from Dario Argento's patchy returns to the art of the knife, perhaps most striking was Eros Puglielli's *Eyes of Crystal* (*Occhi di cristallo*, 2004). However, there was something of a renaissance in Britain, France and elsewhere in Europe. The British psycho-in-a-lighthouse opus *Lighthouse* (1999) was reminiscent of 1970s British shocker *Tower of Evil*.

Moving away from the satirical tone of *Scream*, British films that embraced the new wave of slasher included *Long Time Dead* (2002), *Creep* (2004), *The Descent* (2005), *Severance* (2006), *Wilderness* (2006), *Eden Lake* (2008), *The Children* (2008) and *Tormented* (2009). From France came two exceptionally visceral shockers, the excellent *High Tension* (*Haute tension*, 2003) and *Inside* (2007), the latter exploiting the fear of pregnant women that someone might want a baby so much she would kill for it. Austria's *Dead in 3 Days* (*In 3 Tagen bist du tot*, 2006) was a retelling of *I Know What You Did Last Summer*. The Netherlands produced *Slaughter Night* (*Sl8n8*, 2006), and Germany produced teen slashers *Schools Out* (*Schrei-denn ich werde dich töten!*, 1999) and *The Pool* (*Stemming Pool – Der Tod feiert mit*, 2001). From Norway came *Cold Prey* (*Fritt Vilt*, 2006) featuring a psychopathic killer stalking hapless snowboarders in the snowy wastes, its sequel, *Cold Prey 2* (*Fritt Vilt II*, 2008), is one of the best post-*Scream* slashers of recent years.



CONCLUSION

The end? I don't think so. As much as it's loathed and loved in equal measures, and as long as it remains profitable, the slasher subgenre is sure to survive. There will always be nostalgia for these movies, and today's teenagers will look back fondly on the slasher films of today (even if they are mostly pale imitations).

The slasher film's story is a strange one, to

at Le Theatre du Grand Guignol by way of Agatha Christie and the 'Old Dark House' thrillers of the 1920s and 1930s, it started to take the form we recognize today with

that despite their failin

demand our

and *giallo*

RULING THE BOX OFFICE

Proto-slashers such as *Black Christmas* and *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* provided the impetus for the birth of the seminal modern slasher, *Halloween*, in 1978. It launched a new horror movement that all but ruled the box office in the early 1980s with *Friday the 13th* and a hundred others leading the bloody onslaught. The slasher has shown i staying power by riding out the tough tim uring which it became unfashionable and descended into low-budget video hell.

slasher rebirth in 1996 showed that you can't keep a good subgenre down. It is remarkable that it survived being spoofed and deconstructed only to flourish again

IMPERVIOUS TO CRITICISM

EMERGING TALENT

GOLDEN AGE SLASHER REVIEWS

This section features 10 of the key films of the Golden Age chosen as some of the best examples of the subgenre. The reviews are condensed versions of those on my site, Hysteria Lives! (www.hysteria-lives.co.uk), and the synopses are brief, as the films have already been mentioned in the main text.

Each listing features the title and year, main credits, choice dialogue, synopsis and review.

Key:
d – director
p – producer
c – cast

FRIDAY THE 13TH (1980)

d
p
c

Choice dialogue: 'Do ya think you'll last all summer?'
'I don't know if I'm going to last all week!'

Synopsis: In 1958 a tragic accident at Camp Crystal Lake sees the supposed drowning of a young boy while camp

is quickly closed. In 1980 a plucky young bunch of people are hired to prepare

Review

PROM NIGHT (1980)

d
p
c

Review.

Choice dialogue

Synopsis.

TERROR TRAIN (1980)

d
p
c

Hart Bochner, David Copperfield
Derek McKinnon, Sandee Currie

Choice dialogue: 'With a party like that I'm always afraid some kid's going to hurt themselves'

Synopsis: Students arrange a graduation celebration on a train, and along for the ride are a magician and his mysterious female assistant. However, also along for the ride is someone with murder on his her mind, and the student body begins to be whittled down one by one

Review: Of course *Terror Train* is famous for being another of the slasher films that Curtis made after *Halloween*. Here she is a little bit more cocky but is essentially still a sympathetic character, battling the psycho and doing Final Girl duty. Despite an arresting opening, the film drags in the first half. The makers seemed so thrilled to have real-life magician David Copperfield's involvement that they forgot to get the film moving. Thankfully the killer, who wears the costume of the last person killed actually looks pretty spooky, with cold eyes peering emotionless from behind the succession of masks stolen from each victim in turn

Terror Train is surprisingly sadistic, especially towards the end when the tone changes quite dramatically from cheesy to something a few shades darker. You get the sense that whoever is doing the killing really wants to make the group suffer – and as the group is mostly male, they make up most of the film's victims (only one victim is female). Curtis shines during the climactic confrontation with the killer with Spottiswoode making good use of the claustrophobic train setting. The film is blessed with a strong performance from Bochner as a nasty frat boy and striking cinematography by John Alcott (who did *The Shining* that same year). The final twist is silly but satisfying

THE BURNING (1981)

Filmways Pictures. The Cropsy Venture
United States), 91 minutes
d Tony Maylam
p Harvey Weinstein
c Brian Matthews, Leah Ayres,
Brian Backer, Larry Joshua
Jason Alexander, Ned Eisenberg
Fisher Stevens, Lou David, Holly Hunter

Choice dialogue: 'He's out there watching . . . waiting. So don't look – he'll see you. Don't breathe – he'll hear you. Don't move . . . YOU'RE DEAD!'

Synopsis: A much-hated caretaker at Camp Blackfoot summer camp, nicknamed Cropsy, is horribly burned when the kids decide to play a trick on him – with tragic consequences. Leaving the hospital, garden shears in hand, Cropsy returns to his old stomping ground to do a little teen pruning

Review: Perhaps the most obvious rip off of (or homage to, if you're feeling generous) the previous year's *Friday the 13th*, *The Burning* remains infamous for the level

Although it never gave birth to a sequel,

distinction of being one of the few early 1980s slashers to feature a Final Boy rather than a Final Girl

THE FUNHOUSE (1981)

Choice dialogue:

Synopsis

Review

said, 'A clown is funny in the circus ring but what would be the normal reaction to

HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO ME (1981)

Review

Choice dialogue

Synopsis

and her mother dead? And will she find

Birthday to Me'?

minutes, when the

much of the fact that audiences were

murders that you will ever see', including

this movie and not six

ever made, clocking in at 110 minutes

HELL NIGHT (1981)

BLT Productions/Media Home Entertainment, United States; 101 minutes

d Tom DeSimone

p Irwin Yablans and Bruce Cohn Curtis

c Linda Blair, Vincent Van Patten, Peter Barton, Kevin Brophy, Jenny Neumann, Suki Goodwin

Choice dialogue: 'If you weren't screaming, and we weren't screaming – then someone is trying to mind-fuck us here!'

Synopsis: Desperate to join the Alpha Sigma Rho fraternity and its sister sorority, four pledges must prove themselves by staying the night in a supposedly haunted house. That night, a murderous presence stirs and is none too pleased that a bunch of boozing, pill-popping, sex-crazed teens are trespassing!

Review: In the first few frames the screaming mouth of a teenage girl fills the screen. This isn't a scream of real terror but a fog-horn howl to signal the ghoulish campery has begun. *Hell Night* is a good-times ghost train of a slasher movie: hokey and creaky, but always fun. The spooky gothic mansion makes the perfect backdrop, and decking out the teenagers in costumes nicely reinforces the funhouse feel. The film's bogeymen do their jobs with relish, and the whole cast is clearly having a blast throughout.

Blair plays Marti, who is earmarked as the Final Girl not just because of her star status but from her boyish name, à la Jamie Lee Curtis's Laurie in *Halloween*. Relatively light on blood and nudity, it is still one of the most enjoyable of the early 1980s slasher flicks. It takes itself seriously enough to stop from descending into farce and positively revels in its absurdities. Director DeSimone handles the action well, apart from an ill-advised detour into the supernatural.

Although it seems funny to talk about innocence in a film where a bunch of people are carved up in creative ways, *Hell Night* is a perfect twilight example of the slasher flick before it descended into self-parody and saw its budgets shrink.

MY BLOODY VALENTINE (1981)

Secret Films/Canadian Film Development Corporation/Famous Players; Canada, 91 minutes

d George Mihalka

p André Link, John Dunning, Stephen Miller

c Paul Kelman, Lori Hallier, Neil Affleck, Keith Knight, Alf Humphreys, Cynthia Dale, Helene Udy, Rob Stein, Thomas Kovacs, Peter Cowper

Choice dialogue: 'You gotta see the dress I got. Cut down to there, split up to here . . . I may not get out alive!'

Synopsis: Twenty years ago the small town of Valentine Bluffs was rocked by an explosion in the Hanniger Coal Mines. Harry Warden (Cowper), the only survivor, took bloody revenge on the supervisors who neglected their duties while partying at the annual Valentine's Day dance. He

celebrate Valentine's Day once more.

Review

Lois Kelso Hunt

Choice dialogue

Synopsis

Review

THE HOUSE ON SORORITY ROW (1983)

d

only adds to the fun. Cleverly plotted and bolstered by a good score from genre regular Richard Band, there is an intriguing subplot and enough twists and turns to keep the most jaded slasher fan on their toes. Brian De Palma protegé Rosman shows a flair for the macabre: a head turns up in the toilet bowl, children's toys appear before many of the murders, the killer's clown costume is extremely creepy, and, in an especially effective scene, McNeil discovers all her friends floating dead in the swimming pool. The party (complete with de rigeur bad 1980s band) lends a pleasingly cheesy feel to the proceedings but doesn't overpower the horror and thriller elements.

A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET (1984)

(New Line Cinema/Smart Egg Pictures, United States, 91 minutes)
d Wes Craven
p Robert Shaye, Sara Risher
c John Saxon, Ronee Blakley, Heather Langenkamp, Amanda Wyss, Jsu Garcia, Johnny Depp, Robert Englund

Choice dialogue: 'Whatever you do, don't fall asleep'

Synopsis: Four high school students discover they are having similar nightmares about a bogeyman figure in a dirty red-and-green-striped sweater stalking them. On his right hand is a glove with knives as fingers. They begin to die one by one in seemingly impossible ways. Nancy (Langenkamp) finds out the strange events may be linked to a child killer who died in a fire years before. She discovers that dreams really can kill and does everything she can to stay awake.

Review: *A Nightmare on Elm Street* introduced Freddy Krueger (Englund) to the world – it was also my introduction to the slasher cinema-going experience.

Masterfully helmed by genre regular Wes Craven, it was a breath of fresh air for the subgenre. Surreal and genuinely unnerving, it uses the basic setup for the teen slasher flick but takes it in new directions. Craven understands the way that dreams and nightmares work – the fuzzy logic of not questioning how a step through a doorway can lead you somewhere you shouldn't be.

There are also creepily effective, off-kilter flourishes (the sheep running along a school corridor; the bloody living corpse in the body bag). Many of the later sequels turned Freddy into a cartoonish buffoon, and it's easy to forget that he was a genuinely frightening presence in the original. Langenkamp plays what could be seen as the ultimate Final Girl. Almost a pastiche of the heroines in other slasher movies, she is limitlessly resourceful, plotting and setting booby traps for her climactic battle with Freddy, who really meets his match. The young cast, including a fresh-faced Johnny Depp, acquit themselves well, but an appalling turn by Ronee Blakley as Nancy's mother provides some laughs but detracts from what is otherwise a first-rate chiller.

THE TOP 10 BODY COUNTS

HALLOWEEN

BODY COUNT 5 †††††
Female: 3 Male: 2

1. Female repeatedly stabbed with butcher's knife
2. Male's corpse glimpsed in undergrowth
3. Female strangled and stabbed
4. Male impaled on butcher's knife
5. Female strangled with telephone cord

FRIDAY THE 13TH

BODY COUNT 9 †††††††††
Female: 4 Male: 5

1. Male stabbed in gut
2. Female has throat slit (off-screen)
3. Female has throat slit
4. Male has throat slit (off-screen)
5. Male has arrow forced through neck
6. Female has axe buried in her face
7. Female killed (method unseen)
8. Male stabbed in gut
9. Male has throat slit; shot with arrows (off-screen)
10. Female decapitated with machete

PROM NIGHT

BODY COUNT 8 ††††††††
Female: 5 Male: 3

1. Young girl falls to her death after prank backfires
2. Female found stabbed to death with broken glass (off-screen)
3. Female has throat slit with shard of glass
4. Female stabbed to death with shard of glass
5. Male dies when van goes over a cliff and explodes
6. Female killed with axe
7. Male decapitated with axe
8. Male dies from head wound inflicted with axe

THE BURNING

BODY COUNT 10 ††††††††††
Female: 5 Male: 5

1. Female stabbed with scissors and pushed through window
2. Female has throat cut with garden shears
3. Male stabbed in the chest with shears

4. Female stabbed in the stomach with shears
5 Male has his fingers snipped off with shears
6 Male stabbed in the neck with shears
7. Female slashed across the forehead with shears
8. Female teen stabbed with shears (off-screen)
9. Male teen impaled on shears (through neck)
10. Male impaled on shears, head split with axe and then set on fire

THE FUNHOUSE

**BODY COUNT 6 †††††† **
Female: 2 Male: 4

1. Female strangled
2. Male hanged and then gets an axe to the head
3. Female strangled and bludgeoned to death
4. Male impaled on sword
5. Male shot dead
6 Male crushed to death in the funhouse machinery

HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO ME

BODY COUNT 9 †††††††††
Female: 3 Male: 6

1. Female has throat cut with 'cut-throat' razor
2. Male's face is dragged into motorcycle wheel after his scarf is thrown into it
3. Male crushed by weight-lifting apparatus
4. Male stabbed in gut with garden shears
5. Male impaled on shish kebab through mouth
6. Female drowns when car goes into river
7 Male battered to death with poker
8. Male has throat slit
9 Female stabbed in gut with knife

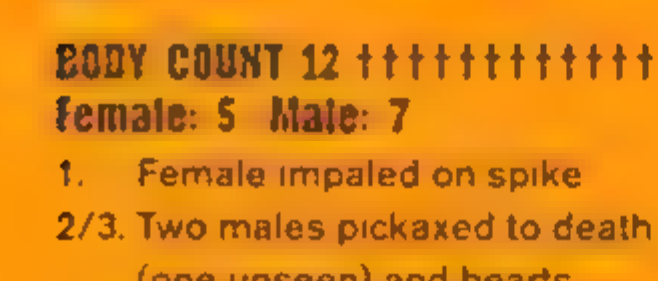
HELLNIGHT

BODY COUNT 8 ††††††††
Female: 2 Male: 6

1. Female decapitated with machete
2. Male has neck broken
3. Male impaled on scythe
4. Male shot with shotgun
5. Male killed (method unseen)
6. Female body found
7. Male thrown to his death
8. Male impaled on gate spikes

BODY COUNT 12 †††††††††††
Female: 5 Male: 7

1. Female impaled on spike
2/3. Two males pickaxed to death (one unseen) and hearts removed
4. Female pickaxed and then tumble dried to death
5. Male pickaxed through chest
6. Male has face pushed into pot of boiling water
7. Female impaled on shower unit
8/9. Male and female impaled by industrial drill while having sex
10. Male shot with nail gun in head
11. Male hung and then decapitated
12. Female pickaxed through stomach



BODY COUNT 9 †††††††††
Female: 7 Male: 2

1. Female shot dead
2. Male given bloody tracheotomy with walking cane
3 Female stabbed to death with cane
4 Female impaled on cane
5. Female has hand impaled and then stabbed to death with cane
6. Female decapitated with knife
7. Female has throat cut
8. Female hacked to death with cane
9. Male hacked to death with cane

BODY COUNT 4 ††††
Female: 2 Male: 2

1. Female slashed to death
2. Male hung on twisted sheets
3 Male pulled through bed and liquidized
4. Female burnt to death

BEFORE THEY WERE FAMOUS

Apart from Jamie Lee Curtis, a number of today's screen celebrities also started out in slasher movies during the subgenre's Golden Age, although many may choose to forget it.

Holly Hunter: The Oscar winner's first film role was as a teen camper in a blink-and-you'll-miss-it part in *The Burning* (1981)

Jason Alexander: Another *The Burning* survivor making his debut was the TV funny man most famous for his role in the popular TV comedy series *Seinfeld*

Kevin Bacon: Played the consummate horny teenager in the original *Friday the 13th* (1980). He is still making high-profile films in Hollywood today.

Johnny Depp: Played the Final Girl's love interest in *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984).

Kevin Costner: *The Untouchables* (1987) star made his debut in the terminally cheesy slasher *Shadows Run Black* (1981).

Dennis Quaid: Had an early role as a love interest in TV slasher *Are You in the House Alone?* (1978).

Daryl Hannah: Battled a psychotic forest woman in *The Final Terror* (1983). She didn't die but did have her throat slashed and sewn back up in the movie.

Jennifer Jason Leigh: Played a deaf, mute and blind teenager who fights back against the mad killer in *Eyes of a Stranger* (1980).

Rachel Ward: Fought for her life in *The Final Terror*. However, she was also a suspect for the decapitation murders in *Night School* (1981).

Brooke Shields: *Communion* (1976) saw Shields make her film debut as a child who is strangled just ahead of her first holy communion.

Christopher Lloyd: Before the *Back to the Future* film series (1985–1990) cemented his fame, Lloyd played the archetypal creepy boiler man in *Schizoid* (1980).

Tom Hanks: Made his movie debut in *He Knows You're Alone* (1980) as a good-natured psychology major called Elliott who escapes the killer's knife.

And others: The end of the Golden Age of slasher movies didn't stop eager young actors and actresses from lining up to appear in them. A few more include Kristin Davis (of *Sex and the City* fame), who had her face cut in half with a buzz saw in *Doom Asylum* (1987). Brad Pitt survived having his head put in a vice in *Cutting Class* (1989). Jennifer Aniston was chased by a tiny but deadly Irishman in *Leprechaun* (1993); and Renee Zellweger and Matthew McConaughey slummed it in *Return of the Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1994).

BLOODBATH AT THE BOX OFFICE

Below is a selection of Golden Age slashers that lit up the box office (and some that didn't). Listed are the original box-office takings in the United States as well as those adjusted for inflation. To put it in perspective, when adjusted, John Carpenter's *Halloween* made more than twice as much money as the 2007 remake.

TITLE	YEAR	ORIGINAL TAKE	ADJUSTED FOR INFLATION
Halloween	1978	$47,000,000	$144,213,675
When a Stranger Calls	1979	$20,149,106	$57,637,681
Friday the 13th	1980	$39,754,601	$121,982,066
He Knows You're Alone	1980	$4,875,436	$13,013,245
Prom Night	1980	$14,796,236	$39,493,298
Silent Scream	1980	$15,800,000	$42,172,490
Eyes of a Stranger	1981	$1,118,634	$2 889,133
Friday the 13th Part 2	1981	$21,722,776	$56,104,148
Halloween II	1981	$25,533,818	$65,947,054
Happy Birthday to Me	1981	$10,000,000	$25,827,338
Hell Night	1981	$2,300,000	$5,940,287
My Bloody Valentine	1981	$5,672,031	$14,649,346
Friday the 13th Part 3	1982	$34,581,519	$84,454,182
Visiting Hours	1982	$13,258,670	$32,380,017
The House on Sorority Row	1983	$10,604,986	$24,172,634
Psycho II	1983	$34,725,000	$79,150,948
A Nightmare on Elm Street	1984	$25,504,513	$54,500,714
Friday the 13th: The Final Chapter	1984	$32,980,880	$70,476,998
Silent Night, Deadly Night	1984	$2,491,460	$5,324,012

Figures taken from Boxofficemojo.com and the-numbers.com

GLOSSARY

body count

creative kill

Final Girl (FG)

Grand Guignol

gravita

killer

krimi

POV (point of view)

proto slasher

psycho thriller

slasher movie

slasher sequels

splatter movie (or gore movie)

T&A

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Cover captions: Neon art from *Bodycount* (*front*); shish kebab of death from *Happy Birthday to Me* (*back*); Jason Voorhees from *Friday the 13th* franchise (*front flap*); *A Nightmare on Elm Street*'s Freddy Krueger bids you welcome (*back flap*).
Inside flap captions: British cinema poster for the original *Friday the 13th*; vibrant Mexican lobby card for *Terror Train*.
Page 2 caption: Michael Myers returns in the remake of *Halloween*.

EL TREN DEL TERROR

J. A. Kerswell fell in love with the slasher movie after watching *Halloween II* (1981) at an impressionable age. It's a love he's been unable to shake through the best and very worst the subgenre has had to offer. Founder of the slasher movie website Hysteria Lives! (www.hysteria-lives.co.uk), which has been reporting on "slasher trash with panache" for over a decade, he knows more about the slasher movie than anyone should.

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